The golden years are ahead...

The golden years of life begin after the golden jubilee.
Celebrate the richer phase of life.

Action Man
Julio Ribeiro

Exclusive column by Victor Banerjee
Real life in an old-age home
Surrender to the wilds of Madhya Pradesh

Kanha National Park (180 km from Jabalpur): Kanha’s solid hard woods, grasslands and streams stretch over 945 sq km in dramatic natural splendor. This Project Tiger Reserve is home to a amazing variety of wildlife. It is also a habitat of the rare endangered Barasingha. Besides, there are over 200 species of birds, making it a birdwatcher’s paradise.

Bandhavgarh National Park (164 km from Jabalpur). Bandhavgarh National Park is one place where you can be almost certain of seeing tigers in their natural habitat. Stretching over 448 sq. km, Bandhavgarh National Park is rich in other forms of wildlife. Its diverse, abundant and wild flora is equally rich in the same. In the same area, there are over 200 species. Dominating the park is the Bandhavgarh fort, an enormous panoramic castle, with rock-cut and stone structures providing protection to its tigers.

Pench National Park (110 km from Nagpur), 195 km from Jabalpur. The French Tiger Reserve forming the core of the Bilaspur to Kanha National Park is spread across 260 sq km with forest. One of the highest density of tigers in India.

Jungle Plan for Tiger Country Welcome to Kanha, Pench & Bandhavgarh. Madhya Pradesh’s premier National Parks. Visiting these wildlife havens is now made easy for your clients, but as is evident, this is no ordinary Jungle Safari. From the minute they arrive, your clients will create lifelong memories. We will take care of all entry formalities, accommodation and meals. Tiger shows, guided park walks and the services of a forest guide are all part of our Jungle Plan. So are bicycle rides, camp fires and safaris. In short, we’ll ensure your clients return home with wonderful memories.

Madhya Pradesh State Tourism Development Corporation

Incredible India
IT WAS THE 10TH ANNIVERSARY of the Harmony Art Show last month, an event I have cherished putting together for the past decade. I believe that a life untouched by any form of artistic expression is incomplete. That belief has been the moving spirit of the show. Through the years, it has evolved to become the country’s largest private exhibition of Indian contemporary art, bringing emerging artists into the spotlight and honouring old masters.

This year, we presented the Harmony Heritage Award for Lifetime Contribution in Art, Culture or Literature, an award instituted in 1998, to Padmashri Krishen Khanna, 79, and Padmashri Ram Kumar, 81. Their body of work is outstanding, and they have not just revolutionised art in India but made their mark internationally. The show also featured a series of interactive ‘Art Talks’ with renowned artists. During one of them, 66-year-old Jogen Chowdhury spoke movingly about how Partition played an important role in the evolution of his art, lending it a dark side—his family moved from present-day Bangladesh to Calcutta in 1947. Life can indeed play a definitive role in art. But, in turn, art has the power to touch lives, even change them.

In 2002, the Harmony Art Show first lent a platform to Aseema, an NGO engaged in the rehabilitation and education of street children, and helped nurture the organisation. This support continues and, this year, it extended to another NGO, Pratham, which also works towards education for children.

The greatest achievement of the show, though, is that it has taken art off its pedestal. Art should know no boundaries, no precincts. It should not be the preserve of a select few, but be accessible to everybody. From the young to the elderly.

Many silvers attended the show held at Mumbai’s World Trade Centre, including 70-odd members of the Harmony Intertative Centre in Girgaum and 50 members of the Ghatkopar Senior Citizens’ Association. Rohini Damani, 58, a member of the Harmony Centre, said the show inspired her to pick up a paintbrush and get creative as a way to banish loneliness. Sarla Kothari, 60, was insistent that the older artists were “much more talented” than the young ones! And 74-year-old Anil Parikh, secretary of the Ghatkopar association, felt that viewing art transports seniors away from the problems of daily life, taking them to a more peaceful, happier place. “Art can make life’s moments richer,” were his words.

I couldn’t have said it better.

Tina Ambani
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This month, we tell the harrowing story of a senior citizen living in a government-run old-age home in New Delhi. While reporting “A Day In The Life Of K Lal”, correspondent Teena Baruah thought it would be a fairly straightforward assignment. Nothing prepared her for the shock. She found that the residents of the home don’t get as much ration as they should. Last year, officials at the home also stopped giving residents free medicines, while the nearest hospital is a two-hour walk away. Yet Lal, who turned 90 on the day of the interview, doesn’t regret not living with any of his eight children.

Lal likes his freedom and his focus is clearly to live life to the fullest and not take anything lying down. For the past nine years, he has voiced his discontent through letters to politicians and journalists—but no one has stopped by to check on the home’s residents. From now, Harmony is on his side. Lal is but a symbol of real life in a government-run old-age home. Some readers may find our feature grim, but we wanted to showcase Lal’s predicament to try and change the life of disadvantaged silvers in India.

A part of Harmony’s agenda is to help you work again. We do this by highlighting the lives of those who have created second careers for themselves by running fledgling businesses or small empires out of their homes or getting back to work. We also have experts at two of India’s leading job portals—www.naukri.com and www.monster.com—to answer your job-related queries. Keep writing with questions, feedback and suggestions. Your concerns and needs are precious to us.

—Meeta Bhatti
I am a research worker in social gerontology and regularly work with senior citizens. The manner in which most silverns are taken care of in a family today speaks of gross neglect. There is an increasing demand for old-age homes. There are many old-age homes already in India but most of them are not properly managed. In this context, the Dhirubhai Ambani Memorial Trust could help develop an ideal old-age home in our country.

Old age is often accompanied by conditions like Parkinson’s disease, dementia, incontinence, arthritis and osteoporosis. Unfortunately, most old-age homes do not have the necessary infrastructure to tackle such cases. Managers and workers of these homes do not have specialised geriatric training. There is hardly any monitoring system to maintain even basic standards in these homes.

An old-age home should ideally offer various social and cultural activities for its residents and not make them feel isolated, as is the case in India. Finally, many old-age homes demand a large amount of money as deposit from residents. Some of these homes do not even have a government licence and become a risky proposition for seniors.

It’s time for a serious rethink on the part of the government on how our old-age homes should be managed. There should be a fixed benchmark for operational standards. If an old-age home doesn’t make the mark, it should not be granted a licence. These measures will go a long way in making our old-age homes happier, healthier havens for seniors.

I dream of an old-age home that offers the best modern services, yet remains compassionate to its residents. Such a home should have the capacity to house at least a thousand people, yet must focus on quality performance and score high grades for its services. This model should be developed according to international standards and upheld as a perfect example of an abode for seniors. In addition, a research institute in gerontology that offers a postgraduate degree on the subject is the need of the hour.

HARE KRISHNA CHAKRABORTY
Agartala

The letter of the month wins a gift from Vimal

I am a 57-year-old interior decorator and your April 2005 issue made me feel very young! The news items in the Orbit section, “Digital Divide” and “Net Works”, were delightful. Not all silverns are computer-savvy but these write-ups may well give them extra motivation. I suggest you introduce a Silver Club to encourage silverns to exchange views on various issues.

ASHOK KUMAR
Ahmedabad

I am a 67-year-old senior citizen and a regular reader. I read about Sushil Kumar’s experience in “Fight for Justice” (‘Your Space’, April 2005). I had a similar experience when my LIC policy matured a few years ago. My cheque was stolen in the post and was deposited in a cooperative bank in Andheri in an account fraudently opened under my name. Ultimately, it took a CID inquiry to ascertain the facts. It took me eight months to receive my cheque and despite my repeated request for interest for the time lost, it was never granted. I didn’t insist; had I done so, they would have taken even longer to give me the cheque.

J B MEHTA
Mumbai

This year’s Budget was encouraging, but not very responsive to the requirements of senior citizens. The only relief given was a tax-free income of Rs 1.5 lakh. This should be raised to at least Rs 2 lakh so that senior citizens can live comfortably since they have to spend a substantial amount on medicines and healthcare. Additionally, the rate of interest on bank savings is 9 per cent but the lock-in period
is three years. This does not help seniors, as they might have to withdraw money prior to that period due to unforeseen expenses. If this time period is scaled down to 12 months, it would aid us greatly. Please bring this to the notice of the honourable finance minister.

PROFESSOR R DASGUPTA
Bhopal

CLARIFICATION

With reference to the article “A Helping Hand” in the March 2005 issue of Harmony, I would like to make a few observations. The National Institute of Social Defence (NISD) was not launched as part of the National Policy on Older Persons (NPOP) but was set up initially as the Central Bureau of Correctional Services in 1961. It was rechristened NISD in 1975. The institute has been dealing with issues related to old-age care. It launched the National Initiative on Care for Elderly (NICE) in 2000 as part of the NPOP announced by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment in 1999. A certificate course (six months) and a diploma course (one year) were also introduced as part of this initiative. Your article stated that all the institutes, including NISD, that train caregivers for a period of three to 18 months charge a fee of Rs 500 per month. We wish to clarify that both the six-month certificate course and one-year diploma course run by NISD are free of cost. The institute also provides a stipend of Rs 600 per month to candidates participating in these courses. NISD runs two six-month courses in Delhi and one each at Kolkata and Bhubaneswar every year. The institute has also started a six-month course at Agartala this February. NISD collaborates with local institutes and NGOs of repute to run the course in these regional centres.

VAGISH K JHA
Media Consultant, NISD, New Delhi

On page 36 of the April issue, in the story on bereavement, “Mending a Broken Heart”, the photograph of Nancy Fonseca was captioned as Patricia Sequeira. The error is regretted. Also, owing to a technical problem, the accompanying essay by Khuswant Singh (“Learning to Live Alone”) did not print properly.

—Editors

AN INVITATION FROM HARMONY

We are looking for contributions from our readers. Write to us if...

- You had an experience related to money or finance which others can learn from
- You faced a serious health problem and conquered it
- You know of someone who has done something exceptional after the age of 55
- You want to share your hobbies and interesting travel experiences with others
- You have a funny or insightful anecdote about your grandchildren...and we'll print it in the column “Your Space”

Mail us at 4th Floor, Maker Chambers IV, Nariman Point, Mumbai-400021. Or email at contact.mag@harmonyindia.org

VICTOR BANERJEE

Victor Banerjee, 57, enjoys his life as actor, writer, documentary maker and passionate trekker in the mountains of Garhwal and Sikkim. Having acted with noted filmmakers like the late Satyajit Ray (Shatranj ke Khiladi, Ghare Baire), David Lean (A Passage to India) and Roman Polanski (Bitter Moon) in the past, Victor is quite a familiar face in the Tollygunge film industry in Kolkata. Recently he has made his presence felt in films like Bhoot, Jogger’s Park and My Brother Nikhil.

This apart, Victor says he “takes his paternal duties seriously”. He also supervises Janamangal Adarsha Andha Vidyalaya, a school for the visually impaired, that was set up by his father in Moran, a small town in Assam. This month, he is Harmony’s man at large.
The Harmony Manifesto (Harmony, March 2005)—our alternative to the National Policy on Older Persons—called for the standardisation of the age for senior citizens across various agencies. As of now, the age for railway concession is 65 for men (and 60 for women), while it’s 63 for discount on airfare. Between Kerala and the rest of India, even the age of retirement is not uniform. The problem is not just limited to India. A report published in Today, an online news site in Singapore, chronicles the travails of a 55-year-old faced with different definitions of ‘senior status’. In Singapore, for travel discounts, one has to be at least 60; for subsidised rates at polyclinics, one must be 65; and 55 to watch films at a discount during off-peak hours. The writer reckons it is time to decide at what age one should be termed as senior citizen. So does Harmony.

UNITED WE STAND
In India, the Harmony Initiative is helping to redefine ageing and bring about a change in the attitudes of silvers. The seeds of a similar movement have just been sown in Philadelphia, in the US. At a conference held by the American Society on Aging and the National Council on the Aging, titled ‘Changing the Face of Aging’, professionals ridiculed the idea of older Americans being seen as a burden on society. Roughly 80 per cent of the American population older than 65 is healthy. Yet they are being bracketed as ‘frail’ and ignored by institutions that serve older Americans, marginalised by the media, devalued in the workplace and shunned by politicians, observed speakers. A swell of voices called for a movement for change. A great start, agreed at the meeting, would be to stand united, and move towards breaking down biases and creating diverse opportunities. The movement to celebrate age is just beginning.
NEWSWORTHY

SECOND SHIFT

To enable silvers to go back to work after retirement, the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), a multi-pronged initiative working for senior citizens, has signed up with 12 major companies to help recruit willing seniors.

It was only last year that AARP—a giant Washington group that represents 35 million older Americans—first felt the need for helping mature workers find a second career. The result was a tie-up with Home Depot, America’s largest home improvement retailer. Home Depot and the other 12 companies will now hire seniors at all levels, from entry-level to managerial.

For many older job applicants in the US, returning to work is an economic necessity, while others welcome the chance to get benefits such as health insurance and social interaction. A survey of retirees by AARP in 2003 revealed that staying mentally and physically active and remaining productive were major incentives to go back to work.

“Just because you’re old doesn’t mean you have to be put out to pasture,” says San Francisco-resident Morry Rotstein, 68, who works two days a week at a Walgreens drugstore, one of the companies that AARP has tied up with. And the money doesn’t hurt either.

DIAL 1090

The Mysore Police launched the city’s first help line for seniors on March 24. The toll-free number, 1090, is aimed at providing protection to elders facing domestic abuse, harassment, neglect or ill-treatment. The line will be open from 8 am to 8 pm, seven days a week. The project is a joint venture with JSS Medical Trust, with added help from the Department of Welfare of Disabled and Senior Citizens in Karnataka. Operated by social workers, police personnel and counsellors, the help line also hopes to assist with medical aid and accommodation in old-age homes on request. For details, contact the project coordinator at JSS Hospital on 0821-2563845; or Commissioner of Police Praveen Sood on 100 or 0821-2418301.

VISA POWER

From April 1, Pakistani nationals over 65 years of age, and children below 12 years, will get their visa immediately on arrival at the Attari checkpoint on the Punjab border. Earlier, they had to apply to the Indian High Commission in Islamabad. The decision was taken at the talks held in Islamabad in December 2004. Such a visa would be valid for a period of 30 days, and on the condition that applicants carry valid travel documents. The facility will be available only on Mondays and Thursdays every week.

PARK PERK

After Mumbai’s Nana Nani Park, Pune now has an exclusive park for silvers by the same name. It was recently inaugurated at Empress Garden, the largest public garden in the city. Covering an area of 35,000 sq ft, the park is maintained by the Agri Horticultural Society of Western Maharashtra, the managing body of Empress Garden. Senior-friendly highlights include specially designed tracks for wheelchair-bound people, easy chairs in place of hard cement benches, a library, and an entertainment area for playing cards, chess and carom. A nominal fee is charged for entry.

Health note: Health Minister Ambumani Ramadoss has called for a revamp of the curriculum in medical colleges to include diseases like osteoporosis and diabetes. These conditions will get priority in the revised syllabus, he said.
ON GUARD

Security is an overriding concern for silvers, not just in India, but the world over. Thieves who deliberately target the homes of the elderly are the focus of a police anti-burglary campaign in Surrey, UK, following a spate of 112 burglaries between January 2004 and February 2005 in the county. Eighty-three per cent of the victims were women.

Chief Inspector Keith Stribblehill, who heads the project, called Operation Gatekeeper, says, “Burglars deliberately look for elderly and vulnerable victims. Seniors are generally quite trusting. They also tend to rely less on banks and have a lot of cash around.” The tricks that the burglars used to gain entry included asking for a glass of water or posing as a plainclothes police officer investigating a burglary. The majority—39 per cent—pretended they were from a utility service like the gas company.

Following some simple advice, says the Surrey Police, could make seniors safer at home: use a spy-hole or chain to check who is at the door, check the caller’s appearance, ask for identification and, if in doubt, call the company they claim to be from. And never open the door to anyone who just drops in out of the blue promising they can fix a problem in your home.

SAFE WATCH

Seniors’ safety was on the agenda at a meeting held last month between the Senior Citizen’s Council of Panchkula in Haryana and senior police officers. The emphasis was on community policing, which enables a synergy between the police and public to check crimes against elders. The main areas of concern were increasing thefts, high-speed driving by youth and lack of night patrolling.

OFFBEAT

100 PLUS

The sun-drenched, coral-ringed Japanese island of Okinawa is home to four times as many people aged over 100 as anywhere else in the world. The average life expectancy on the island is 86 for women and 80 for men. Recent findings also reveal that heart disease, osteoporosis and dementia are rare there. Scientists Craig and Bradley Willcox peg the secret on a combination of diet, exercise and a strong sense of community. “You see amazing things, 80-year-olds taking care of 100-year-olds, and everyone with an aunt who is 95,” they said at a recent conference on longevity in Brisbane.

FIGHTING FIT

Six months after our cover story on seniors taking to the gym (Harmony, October 2004), Kanpur Times reported that mothers-in-law and grandparents in the city are getting serious about fitness to keep their waistlines in check. Local gyms are witnessing an increase in the number of 50-plus people using the treadmill and lifting weights. Interestingly, silver women outnumber younger women in the city’s gyms. They are regular and generally choose yoga and cardiovascular exercises to lose weight.
GEISHA GRANNIES

Ageing geisha in Japan’s ancient capital of Kyoto may soon have new reason to sing and dance, says a report by Reuters. The kimono-clad entertainers have been facing hard times in the face of dwindling patrons. Of the 190 still active geisha in Kyoto, 39 are over the age of 65. To help them, a geisha support group is now planning financial aid for older geisha to continue to study their art and buy kimonos. “The older they get, the less work they have,” says Osamu Ito, deputy head of the Kyoto Traditional Musical Art Promotion Foundation. “We want to offer them support so they can carry on.” The money will come from subscriptions paid by Foundation members and revenue from Foundation events, Ito said. The history of the geisha can be traced back to the 11th century. Down the years, paying patrons took care of the cost of maintaining a geisha—paying for their training in traditional dances, musical instruments, clothing and other expenses. However, with a long economic slump and changing lifestyles, geisha are a luxury few Japanese can afford to indulge.

OUT OF TUNE

German pop stars Udo Jurgens, 70, and Juergen Drews, 59, are under fire. In a bizarre moment during an interview, the two senior artists, proud of their young mistresses, called their fans brainless and criticised senior women’s sexual appetites. The media retorted by calling them “stupid”. Known for their sentimental style, kitsch songs and young dates, the duo now admit they are afraid of former fans threatening to beat them up.

Before the incident, Juergens was especially popular with middle-aged women for his 1976 hit Aber bitte mit sáhne (But with cream please). “His remarks are a smash in the face for women over 40,” sexual therapist Christine Baumanns told Bild, a German newspaper. “Here is a man who is trying to distract from his own fading sexuality.” Drews, fired by his club Majorca for the remarks, has since apologised to his fans. “I was the one with the amputated brain,” said the singer, best known for his 1974 hit Ein Bett im Kornfeld (A bed in the cornfield). Drews was nevertheless forced to hire two bodyguards after receiving death threats.

STUDENTS AGAIN

With parents increasingly leaving their children to the care of grandparents as they clock long hours at work, a special school to teach grandparents how to raise and educate their grandchildren was recently set up in Liaoyang city, capital of Liaoning province in China. Eight hundred seniors have already enrolled, and with many more signing up, the number of such schools in the city is set to go up to five.
MONEY BYTES

PENSION PLUS

The government’s Standing Committee on Finance has been asked to submit a report on the Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority (PFRDA) Bill 2005, by April 28, so that pension reforms are not delayed any further. The results, not known at the time of going to press, will be eagerly awaited. The Bill—introduced in the Lok Sabha on March 21—aims to put into effect the ordinance announced in December 2004. Besides constituting a PFRDA authority to promote old-age income security, the Bill aims to establish, develop and regulate pension funds so that the interests of subscribers are protected. While the Bill has the support of the National Democratic Alliance, which had started the new pension regime in 2004 during its term, the Left is not too keen on it.

THE BUZZ

GREEN THERAPY

Delhiites will soon get a 30-acre therapy park, the first in the city, built by the Delhi Development Authority. The sanction for the Rs 2-crore park project was granted on March 29. The project aims at combining the environs of a park with treatments like naturopathy, physiotherapy, hydrotherapy, meditation and yoga. “The park will be located next to Safdarjung Hospital,” says Savita Bhandari, director, landscape, DDA. “We decided it would be fitting to build it near a medical institution so that ailing patients can also avail of hospital services.” The proposed food court at the park will only have health food, like coconut water and sprouts. The entry fee to the park, scheduled to open in 2006, will be nominal.

A happy club: The city of Mumbai celebrated 10 years of the laughter club movement with the first-ever International Laughter Yoga Conference, held on March 20. Hundreds of Indian silvers from over 500 laughter clubs participated in the event, which aimed to highlight the role of laughter in preventive heart care. Doctors across the world recommend laughter as an alternate therapy that not only acts as a stress-buster but also helps in improving blood circulation and strengthening the ligaments.
MEDIA WATCH

SILVER MAG

There’s a new magazine on the block for the 50-plus in New York. Launched by American publishers Community Media LLC, NYC Plus claims to be the city’s first general-interest magazine for and about New Yorkers in their 50s, 60s, 70s, 80s, 90s—and 100s. It hit the stands on April 1. The tabloid-sized news magazine addresses the city’s fastest growing population, featuring columns on humour and finance, and essays on culture, housing and art. The monthly is being distributed at seniors’ centres, health establishments, newsstands and other high-traffic locations. It is also available by subscription. For details, go to www.nyc-plus.com.

TIME TO CARE

The importance of long-term caregiving was the subject of a documentary aired on April 10 on American television. Filmed on location across the US, And Thou Shalt Honour Caring for Our Aging Parents sent out the message that longevity comes with a personal cost that must be borne by those who have assumed responsibility of their loved ones. The producers say the commitment of family members could be “a spiritual journey that expands the boundaries of love”.

IN FOCUS

Last month, the British Council in Mumbai held a festival of select English films (April 18-21) starring Om Puri to celebrate his honorary Order of the British Empire (OBE). The 54-year-old actor was awarded the OBE for his contribution to the British film industry in July 2004. The films—White Teeth, Second Generation, Murder and The Canterbury Tales (The Sea Captain’s Tale)—had not been screened in India earlier.

Event: At the Orissa Day celebration in Lucknow organised by the Oriya Samaj and Uttar Pradesh Department of Culture on April 1, the Harmony team met senior citizens and gifted them copies of the magazine.
Pickles add that extra zing to food, be it a spicy mango pickle to jazz up rice and dal, or the sweet chunda (raw mango) eaten with methi parantha. However, seniors are often asked to go easy on them. “Seniors cannot digest oil easily,” explains Mumbai-based nutritionist Dr Vibha Kapadia. “Also, pickles preserved in oil and spices cause acidity and could aggravate existing heart problems.” Now for some good news. Mumbai-based Magna Nutrition Centre has launched a range of five oil-free pickles, preserved in vinegar, salt and sugar. The mixed vegetable, lemon chilli, mango, carrot and mustard and amba haldi pickles come in half-kilo packs. While the mixed vegetable is priced at Rs 100, the rest cost Rs 80 per bottle. Available at: Bangalore: 11th Floor, Barton Centre, MG Road. Tel: 080-57734491; Mumbai: Sassoon Building, 143, M G Road, Kala Ghoda. Tel: 022-22671763, 56237834; Pune: Opposite Jehangir Hospital, Sassoon Road. Tel: 020-56271681

Metrosexual silvers listen up. L’Oreal Paris Dermo-Expertise, a skin care brand for women, has introduced its first ever anti-ageing range for men. Called Men’s Expert, it comprises eight products for different needs. “Men have similar concerns as women, like oiliness, clogged pores, dry skin, wrinkles and sagging,” says Dr Lydia Evans, dermatologist, L’Oreal Paris. “And these affect them on the same time scale. However, the needs of men’s skin are different.” Men have thicker and oilier skin, more prominent pores, and their faces suffer from regular shaving. L’Oreal India says the range will soon be available here.

SO LONG, SUGAR
Getting sugar-free just got easier with two new aspartame-free artificial sweeteners: Zero by Baroda-based pharmaceutical company Alembic, and SugaRite by Naturell, a Mumbai-based company. Aspartame, a key ingredient in most artificial sweeteners, has been a subject of debate for its alleged side effects. Both the products use sucralose instead as their primary ingredient. A derivative of sugar, sucralose is 600 times sweeter than sugar, yet has been certified absolutely safe for diabetics by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA), Joint FAO/WHO Expert Committee on Food Additives and the National Food Authority of Australia. As the name suggests, Zero is shaped like one, and priced at Rs 60 for 90 tablets, while SugaRite’s 100-tablet dispenser is priced at Rs 90. SugaRite is also available as granule sachets (a pack of 50 costs Rs 75) for cooking and baking.

GENTLEMEN FIRST

La gamme

Fini les âges de grossesse.
Premiers âges dans le vrai visage men expert.
Now, life begins at sixty.

Presenting Seniors Postpaid plan from Airtel

There are some things that get better with time. Like when you reach sixty, you reach the perfect time to live life. And freedom to communicate constantly, is the first step on the road to a livelier life. That's exactly where Airtel's Seniors Postpaid plan comes in. It allows you to call select numbers at discounted rates. You are also entitled to discounts at various medical outlets. So choose this plan for yourself today and start living your life afresh.
Welcome to the section where you can share your thoughts and experiences on anything under the sun. Write in, and make this space your own.

A TRADITION OF SERVICE

My family consists of two brothers and two sisters. Our father died when I had just finished school. Being the eldest, I had to take up a job to support the family. I first joined the Indian Air Force as a civilian storekeeper and then joined Air India, where I worked for over 33 years. We lived in a poor locality in Mumbai in one tenement. My salary of Rs 125 was not sufficient so my mother supplemented the income by making lunches for office goers and cotton buttons to sell to tailoring shops—those days there were no plastic buttons. She was always ready to help poor families in the neighbourhood when their children were ill. Her life profoundly influenced all of us. Both my sister and my brother dedicated their life to the Church and went on to become teachers.

Mother Teresa has also played an important role in my life. I first met her in Tokyo at a function. I met her next in Manila, when she opened a chapter of Missionaries of Charity in the Philippines. After that, I met her many times in Kolkata. I would go there often to visit my sister, who was a nun in a convent there. Mother Teresa would insist that I start an initiative to uplift poor women in villages.

Now I am 76 years old, and settled in Goa after retirement. In 2000, I established the Naya Seva Mandal, a social organisation that trains women in tailoring, embroidery, flower making, etc. We run three centres in different villages. After training, we help them in marketing their products. I feel retired people like me should think of doing something to help the poor. And they should not worry about money. Financial aid and help will come from those around you, your family, friends and well wishers—just as it did for me.

—Francis Coelho, Goa

RACE AGAINST TIME

My husband J D Chaturvedi is 59 years old and is a central government officer based in Mumbai. He was to visit Canada on an official tour from October 9-23, 2004. He had to board his Air Canada flight at night on October 9 from New Delhi.

On October 8, while driving his scooter towards Shivaji Park in Mumbai, a four-wheeler banged into him and he fell. Some passers-by got him admitted to a nearby hospital. He had suffered a head injury and required 24 stitches on his forehead. The CT scan, thankfully, revealed no internal injuries. All through this, he kept urging the doctors to complete all the tests quickly since he was determined to make the trip the next day. The doctors tried to persuade him to cancel but he remained adamant.

On the morning of October 9, the hospital authorities discharged him but refused to give him a certificate to travel overseas. Then, he approached a local government hospital and persuaded them to give him a fitness certificate. They were bowled over by his will power and strength and granted him the certificate. It was 1 pm.

He then rushed to the airport and took the 3 pm flight to Delhi, escorted by our son. And he made his Air Canada flight to Ottawa at 11 pm that night.

—Geeta Chaturvedi, Mumbai

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Insurance is the subject matter of solicitation.
I still listen to K L Saigal and watch Guru Dutt’s masterpieces.

I still go to my old bank, take the token and wait for my turn.

I still miss the smell of gum on the inland letter.

I still manage to find spare parts for my vintage Amby.

I still enjoy filter coffee at India Coffee House, Est. 1940.

I still think Sunny’s better than Sachin.

I still have to download pritam aan milo on my computer.
The family equation

GIVE YOUR CHILDREN WHAT you want to receive from them. That’s the equation Jaya and I have lived by.

You can choose to be strict or friendly with your children. I have never raised my hand on Shweta or Abhishek; I feel it is incorrect. I don’t know what the purists say, and, frankly, I can’t be bothered. I have always encouraged them to tell me what they are going through, no matter how hard it is for them to say it, and for me to hear it. It may be ugly, it may be shocking, but once it’s out in the open, we can deal with it.

If you give your children freedom to come to you, you have to be prepared for whatever they come up with. Say, your son tells you he wants to see a certain lady, and you don’t approve. If he insists, you have to go along with it. It’s a tough call, but imposing your decision would undo all the groundwork achieved over the years. We may eventually turn out to be right. But the children have often turned out to be right too. Then, we should let them know we were wrong and apologise.

In this equation of give and take, we must also make room for our children’s opinions on our problems—it could be an issue between Jaya and me, a financial issue or even a decision on how I must conduct myself. I find it encouraging that the children feel confident enough to give us their take. It’s healthy because parents tend to get alienated from the lives of their children. We meet our children less often as they grow older. Most of the time they are exposed to an external atmosphere, one we have no control over. We can only hope that they have the strength of character to say, ‘I will go this far and no further, because I have a certain answerability once I get home.’

That answerability is a family ritual. I lost my father three years ago. Till the end, I still informed him about my schedule. My mother is very unwell now, but I still tell her when I am going out that’s how it’s been. We discuss women, we go out to parties, we even share our shoes and shirts since we’re the same size!

But Shweta and I have never been on backslapping terms. She has always held a position of grace because she’s a woman. And now that she is a mother, she has attained a position of greater maturity. She is the family arbitrator. Whenever there are differences of opinion, even silly fights at home, all three of us get on a conference call to Delhi, where she lives, and things get sorted out. Shweta is the most worldly wise and also the most well read among us. She

If you give your kids the freedom to come to you, be prepared for what they may say

and when I’ll be back. And she will still tell me not to be late, ask me if I have eaten. I ask Shweta and Abhishek the same questions. Now and then, Jaya whacks me and reminds me that our son is a 29-year-old man!

Despite this, Abhishek’s relationship with me is very different from mine with my father. I remained in awe of him all my life and reached a level of camaraderie with him only when I reached my 50s. But I had made a decision that if I were to have a son, he would be a friend of mine. And is also the most eloquent; when we are short of words, she fills in the blanks.

Abhishek meanwhile brings a sense of balance to us. There is a lot of calm in his continence. He takes his time to evaluate a situation. That’s a boon because of the pressures of his profession. The adulation he is now getting can destroy a person, and most youngsters succumb to this rush. I am happy when people come and tell me that Abhishek is a good actor—but happier when they tell me he is a good person.

Amitabh Bachchan, 62, is an actor and goodwill ambassador for UNICEF
Light, sound, action

She’s come into the spotlight with her support to Sanjay Leela Bhansali’s film *Black*. But, over the years, Beroz Vacha has been playing a far more important role, opening up a whole new world for the deafblind in India, finds **Nilanjana Sengupta**

In 1977, Beroz Vacha founded the Helen Keller Institute for the Deaf and Deafblind in Mumbai in honour of the deafblind woman who did pioneering work for the disabled. The institute is in the spotlight today. Vacha’s students taught actors Rani Mukherji and Amitabh Bachchan sign language so they could portray a speech-impaired deafblind girl and her teacher in Sanjay Leela Bhansali’s film *Black*. When asked how she feels about the critical acclaim the film has received, the 76-year-old pauses before saying, “I am happy for Sanjay, I am happy for *Black*.”

For Vacha, her role in opening up a whole new world for the deafblind in India has been much more significant. Often referred to as the ‘mother of Indian sign language’, she was the first to bring in the concept of total communication that includes touch, in addition to sign language and finger spelling sentences in the palm. When the feisty lady crossed the finish line of the Mumbai Marathon’s Harmony-sponsored Silver Run this January, alongside Rajinder Singh Sethi, a visually challenged and hearing-impaired teacher of Braille (see...
Showing The Way, Harmony, February 2005), not many knew her. Now, more people know her name, after the credits of the film acknowledged her support. Vacha was pleasantly surprised.

“A credit line is too insignificant for someone like her,” says Bhansali, who first met Vacha in 1994 before making his debut film Khamoshi on a hearing and speech-impaired couple. “After the three hours I spent with her, I knew I had found my Anne Sullivan [a blind Irish woman who was governess and mentor to Helen Keller].” The filmmaker had no doubt that Vacha would lend her support to Black. “She may not have given birth to them, but she is her students’ mother,” he says.

Vacha, a Parsi from Mumbai, plays the role perfectly—she is stern, fiercely protective and, at times, downright indulgent. She won’t let her students fall, but she won’t hold them either, letting them learn their way through life. “Bachchan’s character in Black is modelled on Beroz and Sullivan,” reveals Bhansali. The similarities are striking, but they end on the screen. Once the tinsel wears off and the veneration dies down, it is to Vacha’s school that journalists flock for the real picture.

Done with the interviews—they took up much of her time after Black released—Vacha is back at work. There are people from other deafblind organisations to meet, and letters to send. “I’m just part of a wheel that keeps turning,” she says.

During her 27-year tenure at the Helen Keller Institute, the wheel has turned many times. The number of students has gone up from three to 150. From a municipal building in Byculla to the more spacious Aditya Birla Centre at Vashi, the infrastructure has also come a long way. The institute at Vashi has a swimming pool for hydrotherapy, occupational therapy facility, an indoor gymnasium, and classrooms. Financial support and donations trickle from individual and group donors—a bulk of it for the Vashi centre came from Rajashree Birla, wife of the late Aditya Birla.

Though paucity of funds is a serious concern, Vacha has not waited for things to happen. Over the years, she has cajoled her way into the coffers of friends, well-wishers and philanthropists. Sense International India, a branch of the UK-based international organisation for the deaf-blind, sent her on a fund-raising trip across Europe in 1996 for the construction of the Vashi centre.
I salute

“God gives me the strength,” says Vacha whose workstation is surrounded by messages from the Bhagavad Gita and the Bible. An adage stuck to her front door says, ‘Nothing is more difficult, and therefore more precious, than to be able to decide, and being responsible for it.’ The last five words are her addition, underlined for effect.

Vacha’s sense of responsibility is keen. In 1977, she quit her job as the principal of the Education Audiology and Research Society (also known as E R Centre), a school for the deaf and blind in Mumbai. “These children needed a different approach and I was willing to try,” she says. With Rs 150 in her pocket, Vacha set up the Helen Keller Institute in the home of a fellow teacher. “Not many took note of a school that had three teachers and as many deafblind children,” says Pervin R that flying was not really my calling, teaching the deafblind was,” she says.

She had barely completed a month as trainee when the principal insisted that she teach a girl who was born deaf, and turned blind at 16. The experience strengthened her will and she decided to make her job a lifelong commitment.

With Rs 150 in her pocket, Vacha set up Helen Keller Institute at a friend’s home

Earlier, as a 25-year-old, Vacha was a licensed pilot. Her husband, the late Commander N H K Vacha, also a founder trustee of Helen Keller, was posted by the Navy to Patna in the 1960s, where she spent four years learning how to fly. In 1965, a chance meeting with a friend in Kolkata led Vacha to the Aural School for the Deaf in the city. “In due course, I knew “The word ‘enough’ does not exist in her dictionary,” says Suryakant C Dalal, the 80-year-old president of Helen Keller Institute. Five years ago, Vacha introduced computers for the deafblind. “We had only just begun adapting computers for the visually impaired, and she was talking about the deafblind!” recalls Dalal. But within a year, Vacha had deployed the Braille press at Byculla and fitted it with computers. Other highlights included power Brailleers (they convert normal text on a computer screen to Braille) and Braille embossers (to print text documents as Braille sheets). Vacha is now raising funds to buy computers for the Vashi branch.

The Braille press prints a bi-annual newsletter, Deafblindness in Asia, distributed in Asia, Europe and the US. The 15 students who work here, all graduates from the Vashi centre, also translate books and maps into Braille. Vacha supervises this work. “She has no hidden agenda,” says Mehta, who was a teacher at E R Centre when Vacha was principal. “She just wants to do the best she can.”

For Vacha, each day begins with new ideas. She wants to introduce judo at the Vashi school. That done, she plans to follow up on the consolidation and expansion of the institute, check the progress of the five students getting ready for the National Institute of Open Schooling examination and, of course, continue to change perceptions about the deafblind. She is a practitioner of Reiki, an alternative healing therapy. And she breaks into a maxim ever so often. Her latest: “We can’t take the future in our hands. We must move along with the tide.”

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"Save 2 buckets of water everyday."

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Julio Ribeiro, the plain speaking former police officer, tells Meeta Bhatti how activism and his grandchildren make him embrace his 70s.

Cars of all sizes, honking tempo and hand-pulled carts laden with wheat and rice sacks. Crossing the narrow lanes of Bhendi Bazaar, a Muslim-dominated area in South Mumbai, is an exercise of all senses. It’s 2.15 in the afternoon and the road to the municipal school, the only one in the area, is lined with visitors’ cars. It’s unusually crowded and the first floor of the building is like a waiting room. A group of women, young and old, and well-dressed men are waiting for Julio Francis Ribeiro, Mumbai’s former commissioner of police.

As promised, Ribeiro arrives at 2.30 pm, sharp. He is followed by a security guard carrying his briefcase. Today, the former police officer is attending a regular fortnightly meeting on the communal situation in the city. The meeting will be followed by a computer class for women, who, at the end of the session, will exchange ideas about secularism between conversation about knitting and their men, with Ribeiro listening in.

Ribeiro still exudes the same power-packed energy and directness of his days in uniform. The man who policed Punjab and Mumbai, both high on crime and touchy politicians, is now a cop in plain clothes. He fights communalism through Mumbai’s mohalla (neighbourhood) committees that he founded 10 years ago after riots following the demolition of the Babri Masjid. What started as a platform for Hindus and Muslims to ease out frictions, if any, has now evolved into groups of Hindu and Muslim girls who discuss communal harmony after a computer or sewing class.

“It’s a job suited to Ribeiro,” says Satish Sawhney, former commissioner of police, Mumbai, who now works with him at the committees. “He is one of the most natural leaders I have known.”

Ribeiro, however, brushes off the compliment with, “I am a people person and want to contribute to society. And I can still do it because, thankfully, I have not had a major medical problem.”

Beneficiaries of his “people projects” include the residents of Dharavi. Once a fortnight, Ribeiro walks through Mumbai’s largest slum. He addresses most people by their name, and asks them in Marathi about their problems. The concerns range from the land mafia and water shortage to the education of their children. There are no simple solutions. It takes meeting state officials and municipal corporators frequently, and keeps Ribeiro on his toes.

Ribeiro also works as a spokesperson of the Indian music industry—his team and he track buyers and sellers of illegal music. With his daughter Neena Engineer, he also works to protect intellectual property of companies like Hewlett Packard and Citibank. “That’s something I get paid for. Very few officers get paid as much as I do,” says Ribeiro.
Considering his new responsibilities, a suit has replaced the uniform; his burly, over 6-ft frame as proud as ever, his voice sometimes too loud for comfort. No one knows it better than the recalcitrant officers that he disciplined, or former home minister of Maharashtra Chhagan Bhujbal who launched an intertemporal attack against him for his campaign against police corruption two years ago. Or the VHP, whose members he labelled as “pseudo-patriots” after the Gujarat riots.

Ribeiro, who will turn 76 this month, is still shorn of any fear of bullets or people. “My bite is still as hard,” he says. “Not just two attempts to denigrate him; one attempt by a senior to dislodge him; and numerous attempts by politicians to make him conform.”

Ribeiro says he never allowed politicians to interfere in transfers. “During my tenure as the commissioner of police in Bombay from 1982 to 1985, Vasantdada Patil, the then chief minister, once asked me to make one exception,” he recalls. “He said, ‘I will never ask you again’. I replied, ‘Sir, if I do that, I will lose credibility’. So I refused, making it clear that if they wanted it their way, they could have it after relieving me of my duties.”

“I am Catholic but I believe that all religions teach the same universal truth. I also believe that the fear of God brings in the sense of good and bad”

metaphorically, but literally too,” he adds, before flashing his teeth to show a pair of half dentures that conceal his own stubs. It is impossible to see Ribeiro at work and not reflect on how he spent so much of his life as a police officer but without packing a gun.

His transition from a small-town police officer to the director general of police, Punjab, from 1986-88, at the height of terrorism, came with its share of occupational hazards—political interference in his handling of communal clashes in Pune in 1965, and later in Mumbai in 1984; two assassination attempts; be alienated,” says Pinto, adding that no one was as deft in dealing with politicians as his friend.

Even today, Ribeiro’s handling of politicians in different situations is an example for those who complain of political interference. For those who only know him as one of India’s best-known policemen, Ribeiro’s account of his tenure as a cop, envoy and mayor, Bullet for Bullet (Penguin Books, 1998), is a must-read. It’s an apolitical, unbiased autobiography.

THE FAMILY MAN

The one person who gives Julio Francis Ribeiro cold feet is Melba, his wife. “Mrs Ribeiro” will not let

Even today, while lecturing IAS officers, police recruits and students, he includes ‘Resisting the Pressures of Transfers’ as a topic.

“I never asked for any posting. They [politicians] could take me as I am, or let me go,” says Ribeiro, who didn’t protest when K P S Gill objected to his “not hard enough” approach in Punjab, before succeeding him as the DGP. There were many others who didn’t agree with him then. But long-time friend Sydney Pinto—he went to Government Law College in Mumbai with him in 1950—disagrees. “He wanted to win over the population first, not her husband pose for the cameras, or be interviewed at home. And Ribeiro has no option but to meet journalists at the Cricket Club of India (CCI) or his office in Worli. “She doesn’t like publicity,” he reveals. “I have tried telling her that we are accountable to the people. Her logic is that now I am not accountable to anyone but myself, so I needn’t do it.”

Ribeiro says the fear of their women comes naturally to all Indian men, and he has often addressed his message of secularism in the slums to men through their women. “After the Gujarat riots, I got 600 Hindu and Muslim
women from Dharavi to join hands and not let their husbands fight,” recalls Ribeiro.

I am Catholic, but I believe that all religions teach the same universal truth. I also believe that the fear of God brings in the sense of good and bad,” Ribeiro goes on, his steely gaze turning soft, remembering his tenure as the Indian ambassador to Romania. “I was also accredited to Albania, where the Muslim population was 70 per cent. I went there long after dictator Enver Hoxha had abolished religion. There was something about the faces of people there; something that was different from people from elsewhere in the world. Later, when I read about gangs from Albania involved in prostitution rackets across the world, it somehow made sense.”

The God-fearing Ribeiro makes it a point to attend Mass every Sunday, before planning the weekend with his family, another ritual. It means spending time with Melba and his daughters Neena and Anna. Anna’s two daughters are studying abroad, and Neena’s son and daughter are at boarding schools. “Mrs Ribeiro is a Page 3 reader,” he says. “So if she thinks there is a movie to be seen or an art gallery to be visited, we go. On other Sundays, we eat at the CCI.” There, they often bump into friends like former cricketer Dileep Sardesai and his wife Nandini, as we do today. “As handsome as ever, Julio,” says Sardesai. He always says that. The two go back a long way. “He is from Goa like my wife,” explains Ribeiro, “and I have often lectured Mrs Sardesai’s students at St. Xavier’s college.”

Every night, Ribeiro sleeps with the thought of getting back to his desk next morning at 9.45 am. “Life is about fixed hours now. Reading the sports pages of three newspapers, 9.45 am to 1 pm at work. Lunch at home, followed by a nap, and more work till 6 pm,” he chimes, adding how he no longer needs to apply for leave to either attend his granddaughter’s graduation at Sheffield College, in London, to go to Goa to oversee the construction of his house, or to go to the races.

“Two types of people go to the races,” he says, “those who gamble and those who go there to relax. I go there to have a good time.” He made Rs 4,076 at the Mahalaxmi Race Course in March, after paying Rs 700 as taxes. “That’s approximately how much I spent on the sport since January,” he chips in, adding, “I’ve done everything I could dream of.”

The one thing he now hopes to achieve is to learn how to use a computer. “Recently at a mohalla committee class, I presented a Muslim lady with a computer certificate. I guess she was older; she had two front teeth missing. Being told that I still didn’t know how to use a computer, she laughed, and I saw more teeth missing. Well, if she could, I can too,” hopes Ribeiro, looking at his watch. It’s time for him to go back to work.
On March 2, K Lal turned 90. But there were no candles. None of his eight children were present. For the government-run old-age home in Narela in New Delhi, where Lal has spent the past nine years, it was just another day, for just another resident. Teena Baruah spent his birthday with him.

A Day in the Life of K Lal
4 AM
K LAL BEGINS HIS DAY EARLY.
He cleans his room, takes a quick bath in a corner, goes for a walk and, on his return, spends an hour writing letters to politicians and journalists about the state of Gandhi Khadi Building, the old-age home in Narela where he has been living since 1996. On some days, he travels to Delhi by bus to get the letters typed and personally dispatch them to the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment. Other days, he stays in his room, writing or watching TV or going to the courtyard to hear residents recite hymns from the Vedas.

9 AM
Lal ushers me into his 10x12 ft room without windows and shuts the door on curious onlookers who trail behind as we enter one of the two government-run old-age homes in the city—the other one is in Kalkaji. Lal is known as netaji (leader) here. This freedom fighter first raised khadi kurtas lying around. One corner has some idols of deities, while a kitschy god calendar hangs on a wall. Lal greets us warmly: “Welcome to my world.”

He has been living here since 1996. Earlier, six dormitories were shared by 36 seniors. Now, only 16 people live here and share one bathroom and toilet. “I am one of the oldest and loudest lodgers here,” says Lal, explaining how he has a single room. He cooks, eats, sleeps and worships here. After a fall in the bathroom five years ago that led to hip-replacement surgery, he decided to take his bath in his room.

Lal tells us about his action-filled past. He was convicted in 1942 for killing a British officer in Gwalior and sentenced to be executed on August 17, 1947. However, India got independence two days before the fateful day and Lal was set free. After his release, he settled down in Meerut and opened a hardware factory with financial assistance from a local Congress leader. As business picked up, he slowly got each of his eight children married and settled. Two of his sons live in New Delhi; one is a lawyer and the other works as a factory supervisor. Lal refused to accept his freedom fighter’s pension of Rs 200 per month as he consider-
ed it embarrassing to accept such a measly amount. He didn’t need it either.

But his life came to a standstill in 1987 when his wife Prakashwati Jain died of leukaemia. He didn’t want to work any longer and pulled the shutters on his factory. He started living with his sons but felt helpless. “I was living a life in debt. I had innumerable fights with my children and finally decided to move out. Fortunately, I found this place mouse lives with me and keeps me enthralled by running around funnily.”

While his friends at the home prefer to eat in the common kitchen, Lal cooks and eats in his room. Lal suffers from eczema and has been asked by doctors to avoid onions, garlic, tea and coffee. The authorities have allotted him a daily ration of 300 gm of atta or rice, 60 gm dal, a few fruits, 300 gm seasonal vegetables, 30 gm sugar, 5 gm

The authorities stopped giving residents free medicines last year. Nurse Asha David says they don’t need medicines for “routine” old-age conditions. Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment. Lal wasn’t too sure if the move would work out. He was right and the buzz about shifting has now died down. In the sale, some of his walking sticks were auctioned too. He managed to retrieve four of them, all intricately carved.

Lal is lucky to have his own television. Others have to share one between five. The favourite programmes here are *saas-bahu* soaps and cricket matches.

and after a medical test I moved in. The admissions have been closed for the past two years.”

**10 AM**
It’s time for breakfast. The meal usually comprises a no-fuss vegetable curry and 30 chapattis. He eats two for breakfast and keeps aside three for lunch. The rest are for his pet mongrels. They come into his room at 12 noon, sharp. “They are my only real companions for the past few years,” he says, adding, “A tiny masala, including turmeric powder and salt, 20 gm *ghee* and some milk powder. He has been collecting milk powder and sugar for the past few days to make *kheer* for his birthday. Lal, however, claims only a portion of the ration reaches him, after the current superintendent and store officer take their cuts.

**11 AM**
Lal switches on his 22-year-old Beltek television and leans comfortably on a PVC chair. “I

harmony may 2005
“Recently, H L Ghei, a lodger, got us addicted to tennis,” says Lal. “Now, we sit glued to our sets, cheering for Sania Mirza.”

12 PM
It’s a daily ritual. Just before lunch, Lal sets a jar of lemon pickle on the table. “I still remember the pickles my wife prepared. This year, I made some and it tastes as good.” Lal says he no longer misses his family. “My daughters gifted me a mobile last year just to keep in touch. But I returned it. He has sent around 800 letters drafted against the management to journalists, bureaucrats and politicians, and has been cautious ever since.

3 PM
Twice a week, Asha David, a nurse, comes to check on residents. Lal grumbles that her visit doesn’t help as the authorities stopped the facility of giving free medicines in March last year. “She doesn’t try to help us either,” grumbles Lal. after sundown. And the nearest auto stand is at least a two-hour walk away.

4 PM
It is time to meet friends. In Room No. 3, 95-year-old Amar Singh Gupta, a former soldier, 80-year-old tailor Dhulichand and a former homeopathic doctor Satyapal Sharma, who claims he is 105, stir from a leisurely nap. “I want to carry on working and do something useful,” says Dhulichand, running a hand over his antique sewing machine. “But how do we keep ourselves occupied? Arguing over the menu? We argue all the time and nag each other.” None of them want to talk about their families and backgrounds. “Our children do come to take us home for a day or two, especially during festivals and marriages,” adds Dhulichand. “But that’s just to save face.”

There are no plans to celebrate Lal’s birthday. “When you leave home, you leave behind all your disconnected the service recently. I have come to terms with my loneliness. Now, I don’t have to pretend to be a part of society.”

1 PM
After lunch, Lal locks his door carefully as he steps out to clean his utensils at the taps common to everyone for drinking and cleaning. Last year in March, he was robbed of Rs 7,000. There have been more losses when the home’s staff have borrowed large amounts from Lal but never

David breezily dismisses his complaint, saying, “They are all doing very well for their age. High blood pressure, diabetes and body ache are routine at this age. They don’t need any medicines for these conditions.” In case of an emergency, residents are entitled to treatment at the nearby Satywati Raja Harischandra Hospital. Lal is worried about a situation where someone has to be taken to the hospital at odd hours. There is no vehicle parked here

Usha sewing machine. “But how do we keep ourselves occupied? Arguing over the menu? We argue all the time and nag each other.” None of them want to talk about their families and backgrounds. “Our children do come to take us home for a day or two, especially during festivals and marriages,” adds Dhulichand. “But that’s just to save face.”

There are no plans to celebrate Lal’s birthday. “When you leave home, you leave behind all your
hopes, desires and joys,” says Gupta with a sigh. “You are already dead. So why celebrate birthdays, and with whom?” His roommates nod softly, and Dhulichand softly hums a classic Hindi film number, Woh wafah karein. It cheers up the group and they change the subject to a young man, Naresh Gautam, who comes to the home every Navratri with a projector and shows them Ramanand Sagar’s Ramayana non-stop for a whole retirement five years ago as he had no place to go to after vacating his official residence. “I have two daughters but I can’t live with them,” he says. “They are both married. They feel guilty and keep coming back with gifts for all the lodgers. But I don’t like it. The last time. I told them not to come here anymore. Instead, I promised to visit them every month on my way to my doctor in Delhi.” Today, Ghei is excited about his new refrigerator.

day. Other times, some young couples from neighbouring colonies also bring their newborn babies here for blessings.

5 PM
During his evening walk, Lal meets the impeccably dressed H I Ghei, a 75-year-old retired food and beverage manager of Ritz Hotel, Kolkata, the man who got the residents of the home interested in tennis. Ghei started living here after

7 PM
Lal goes back to his room. As I leave, he tells me something Ghei told him recently. “We are like tsunami victims,” Ghei had said. “Everyone pays up their contribution and forgets about us. How else can you explain the fact that, for years, no politician or social worker has ever stopped by to check on us? We are society’s forgettables.” Lal still can’t get over these words. Neither can I. 🌈
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For many silvers in Mumbai, the David Sassoon Library is a place to read, reflect, meet friends and make peace with loneliness, discovers Trina Mukherjee.

It’s late afternoon at the David Sassoon Library in Mumbai. Situated in the city’s Kala Ghoda district, the library stands regal and pleasantly full with visitors leafing through books and magazines.

Silence reigns in the reading room and envelops the garden behind the building. Visitors, including many silvers, lounge, read newspapers, chat softly to each other, or snooze. Interrupt 74-year-old Kanubhai Chatwani from his reverie to ask him why he comes here all the way from Kandivili, a Mumbai suburb, and you get a terse reply: “What do you do for time-pass? You watch TV, read magazines or go shopping. I sit here in silence and read when I want to.”

Rohit Mehta too enjoys the silence, and the memories. The 62-year-old has been coming here for 35 years. “My wife Geeta and I used to come to this library garden to have lunch,” he remembers. “Both of us used to work in nearby offices and turn up to share tiffin and gossip. And my younger daughter used to sit and study here for her accountancy exams.”
recently lost his wife, and both his daughters are married and working. “I used to be an active library committee member some years ago. Now I only come here to chat and read.”

The library houses over 40,000 books, many of them rare volumes from the Raj era. Many senior readers visit the library on fixed days or hours, says Kavita Navare, assistant librarian. Out of the 2,500-odd library members, at least a thousand are senior citizens.

Like Sharmaji. In his 70s, he has frequented the library for over two decades. He used to sit with three of his friends in a corner of the garden. But two of them have passed away and his third friend has stopped coming. He now has to make do with the ‘new’ company of Mehta and Chhaganlal Karia, an ebullient 78-year-old real-estate consultant who lives in central Sion, yet comes here regularly. Karia calls the library “the best address in Mumbai”.

It may have something to do with the architecture. The library is surrounded by 19th century imposing stone structures of its own kind like the Army and Navy Building and Watson’s Hotel. The striking façade is propped up by grey and black pillars and sharp arches in grey and white. The foyer is dim, with black-and-white sketches of old Bombay on the walls. The patterned floor tiles smell of dust and despite the old lamps and chandeliers, the large
Clockwise, M Gandhi (foreground) and his friend, both regular visitors; a view of the library from the garden; Rohit Mehta, who used to come to the garden with his late wife

marble statue of Sassoon, ‘The Merchant Prince of Bombay’, sculpted by English artist T Woolner, looks pallid. But there’s light and sunshine at the end of the entrance hall where the garden begins.

You take the winding wooden staircase to reach the newspaper racks and reading room on the second floor of the three-storied building. The library is open everyday, from 8 am to 9 pm. “We also allow people to come in with their own reading material and sit as long as they want to,” says Jagdish Joshi, president of the library. The adjoining terrace is an idyllic spot for a leisurely read or siesta on the rattan chaise longues and quaint reclining chairs. Many silvers head straight to the terrace, book in hand, from the reading room.

The old-world cupboards in the reading room have old and new labels—‘Literature’, ‘History’, ‘Philosophy’ and ‘Fine Arts’ reside peacefully with ‘Crime’, ‘Gujarati’ and ‘Marathi’ sections. “Once, Sunita DuttaRay Joshi, a former deputy secretary with the state revenue department, called up to inquire about The Great Rebel, a book on Shivaji that was published in 1937 in London,” remembers V Aigaonkar, president emeritus and a library member for over 25 years, since his days at Elphinstone College. “Her father wanted to read the book. We had a copy and she was so pleased that she sent us a donation of Rs 25,000.”
The terrace adjoining the reading room is perfect for members looking for a leisurely read or siesta.

The library, which charges Rs 500 for a year’s membership, and Rs 5,000 for a life membership, relies on the largesse of people like Dutta Ray Joshi and Bhau Phandskar, a 75-year-old patron member, whose donations have enabled the library to buy English books and undertake restoration work. Phandskar even paid the salary of the staff one month on request. A library committee comprising 15 members scouts for donors and contributions from corporate houses.

Funds have been a problem right since the inception of the library. The idea to build a library was conceived by a group of mechanics working at the Royal Mint and the Government Dockyard in 1847. When the construction virtually came to a standstill owing to a cash crunch, Sassoon, a wealthy trader, stepped in, donating a sum of Rs 60,000 to the government in 1863. The building was formally inaugurated on March 24, 1870, after Sir Albert Sassoon, son of David Sassoon, offered another large sum for bookshelves.

The library went on to become a landmark, “one of the most beautiful spaces in the city,” in the words of Sharada Dwivedi, urban historian, heritage conservationist, co-writer of...
Winding wooden staircases and antique cupboards and bookcases add to the charm of the library

*Bombay, the Cities Within*, and a regular visitor. “This is not just a place to take your afternoon nap but a perfect setting to read and exchange creative ideas,” she says. “And I truly love the wonderful garden.”

The garden, with its cobbled walk and tangled greenery, has become a favoured venue for Kala Ghoda art festivals, *kavi sammelan* and music concerts. For regular visitors to the library, it is the perfect place to relax on stone benches and plastic chairs, enjoying the gentle breeze that wafts through the air. The perfect place to catch up with friends and air their views on life, people and, of course, the library.

“If Sassoon had not come forward with the money, there would have been no library for us ‘natives’,” says S R Khanna, a 58-year-old chartered accountant, who comes here regularly to sit for a while and feed the cats that stray into the garden from time to time. Dharmendra Sanghavi, a devout follower of Rajneesh, says the library’s location has helped him spread his message to others. For his part, Karia cannot think of any other place he would want to be. “I hate old-age associations,” he says. “If the library did not exist, I don’t know what I would have done in the evenings.”
There’s nothing like food to bring a family together.

This month, Harmony gets three generations of women from a Goan family and three generations of men from a Sikh family to dish out their favourites cooks lunch every day. She peels, cuts, fries, purees and sautés while catching up on Marathi serials on her black-and-white TV in the adjoining room.

Today, Manda, her mother, and Manda’s 41-year-old daughter Kavita—she lives in suburban Kandivili—are in the same kitchen. Dressed in pink saris, they decide to cook udda methi with mackerel—a Goan fish curry made with coconut and kokum that imparts a sweet-and-sour flavour.

On a table in the kitchen, they have arranged all the ingredients. Manda and Kavita take over. The gas is lit, on goes the iron tawa to roast dhania (coriander) and methi (fenugreek) seeds and urad dal. Manorama, or Aji as she is called by the family, has taken a backseat today because of a sprained finger. Taking advantage of her no-show, mother and daughter

Hearth warming

LADIES DO LUNCH

Building No. 21 stands at the end of a quiet lane in Girgaum, South Mumbai. The occupants of the ground floor, a Daivadnya Brahmin family from Goa, have been living here since 1940. This is the house 65-year-old Manda Lotlikar grew up in. When she returned after the death of her husband, 13 years ago, Manda busied herself visiting her married daughters, getting to know her grandchildren, and eventually spending time at a day-care centre. The family kitchen remained her mother Manorama’s bastion. An 82-year-old great-grandmother of six, Manorama
powder the roasted seasonings in the mixer-grinder. If Ajji had her way, the ‘gadget’ would be out of the kitchen. Manorama still prefers to grind masala in a stone mortar and pestle that has been with the family since 1960.

“Don’t roast all the spices at one go, do them separately,” says Manorama, as she asks me to keep the spice box back on the rack. A round stainless-steel container, the box contains little portions of all the masala one would ever need to jazz up any dish. “If you don’t have kokum in the house, you can use tamarind water to get the chatpata taste,” she tells me. The Lotlikars often make udda methi with raw mangoes as well.

What Manda’s grandchildren—from the eldest at 21 to the youngest at six—love best is their Ajji’s mixed vegetable with prawns. “There is no fixed recipe,” she says. “Sometimes I put in all the vegetables that are in the house. At other times, I make do with just three.” But she cooks it with love in her heart, and that makes the simple dish so unique.

“For generations, our family kitchen has been the favourite room in our home,” says Manda. I can see that few ‘modern-day’ modifications have taken place here. “Once I come here, I just let go,” Kavita tells me. When her sisters visit from Goa and Los Angeles, it is gossip time. “We fry spoonfuls in a bowl for me. It is hot, tangy and spicy all at once. I give them the thumbs-up sign.

Manda transfers the piping hot food into a bowl with practiced ease. Steaming hot rice with a smattering of ghee—a perfect complement to the hot and pungent gravy—is also laid out on the table. We dig in. And the grandmothers look on fondly.

—Nilanjana Sengupta

MACKEREL FISH CURRY

INGREDIENTS

- Mackerel: cleaned and cut in pieces. Marinated in turmeric and salt for half an hour before cooking.
- Coconut: 1, grated
- Coconut oil: 1 tbsp
- Salt: to taste
- Curry leaves
- Red chillies: 8, dried
- Coriander seeds: 1 tsp
- Fenugreek seeds: half tsp
- Rice: 1 tsp
- Urad dal: 1 tsp
- Dried kokum or tamarind water: 2 tsp (You can make tamarind water by soaking a lemon-size ball of tamarind in water for 15 minutes)

For seasoning:
- Urad dal and fenugreek seeds: half tsp

METHOD

Apply salt and turmeric to the cut pieces of fish half an hour before cooking. Roast the coriander seeds and chillies on a hot iron tawa. Keep aside. Roast the remaining spices. Remove. Roast the grated coconut till light brown. Sprinkle some coconut oil if it sticks to the pan. Grind the coconut, roasted

Left, from top, Manda, Kavita and Manorama; piping hot mackerel curry
body & soul | food wise

coriander seeds and chillies into a fine paste with a little water. Add the remaining roasted spices and the rice and run through the mixer. In a wok, heat coconut oil and add the seasoning of urad dal and fenugreek seeds. Add a few curry leaves. Add the ground paste and about two cups of water till you get the desired amount of gravy. Add tamarind water. Add turmeric and salt and bring to a boil. Add the mackerel pieces and simmer for five minutes or till the fish is cooked.

TASTE OF PUNJAB

As a young man working away from home in Hoshiarpur, Punjab, Sardar Arjan Singh had to cook for himself. When he was a contractor in Dubai in the 1970s, he shared a flat with his friends and often dished up gobhi ki sabzi, masala chicken and missi roti. Now, Arjan Singh, 75, steps into the kitchen only when he wishes. “He must have certainly fed his friends but has never cooked for me even once,” says wife Dharam Kaur. Arjan Singh promises to make amends right away, with some help from his son Balbir, 42, and grandson Pavneet, 11.

The courtyard of his home in East Delhi, next door to a gurudwara, is a hive of activity. Three of his sons—except Balbir Singh—are away in Dubai, but their wives Jasbir Kaur, Avtar Kaur and Rajavinder Kaur and children fill up the old house like a continual celebration. With Sunday-washed hair open to their waists, they hover around the kitchen, teasing the men about their culinary skills. For them, cooking is a skill to be worn proudly but lightly.

The house is loosely divided into four family spaces; there are four kitchens for lunch and snacks. Dinner and lunch on Sundays is together though, with Balbir Singh taking over the kitchen on the ground floor twice every month to cook non-vegetarian food, as wife Saravjeet is a vegetarian. The shelves teem with steel utensils shining bright. Punjabi folk songs play on the cassette player and it seems like a wedding’s going on. It’s an occasion, after all—the men are cooking.

One of the family’s favourites is chilli paneer, a recipe Balbir Singh picked up while working as assistant manager in the design department of Delhi’s fast-food chain Nirula’s. He can even cook something as complicated as a lachhna parantha, which reveals paper-thin layers as you eat it. Pavneet, who wants to be an engineer, is a pro at instant noodles and bread pizza—he piles cheese, onion slices and capsicum on bread slices, pushes them into the oven and bale! But his favourites are rajma and baingan ka bharta, which he sometimes demands with chapattis even for breakfast.

Soon, the kitchen is a flurry of activity. The menu: makki ki roti, saag, raita and gajar ka halwa. The three men get to work, chopping the three different greens that go in the dish—sarson (mustard),
**SAAG**

**INGREDIENTS**
- Mustard leaves: 1 kg
- Spinach: Half kg
- Bathua (pigweed): Half kg
- Makki ka atta (cornflour): a small cup
- Salt: 1-and-a-half tsp or to taste
- Red chilli powder: 1-and-a half-tsp or to taste
- Garlic: 10-12 cloves
- Ginger: 50 gm

**METHOD**

Wash the greens well and chop finely, including stems. Cut off the brown bits at the end of the stems, if any. Put them in the pressure cooker with salt and a small bowlful of water. After the first whistle, let it cook on slow burn for 15-20 minutes. Later, check if it is tender between your forefinger and thumb. Sprinkle a small bowl of makki ka atta on it while grinding in a mixer. Add red chilli powder. Temper with ghee, garlic and ginger and serve with makki ki roti, hot off the stove.

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Pavneet, Arjan and Balbir Singh serve up their favourites

**palak** (spinach) and **bathua** (pigweed). The fragrant **saag** is chopped, cucumber and carrots peeled, garlic pounded, sugar sifted. Pavneet grates the cucumber for the **raita**. The **saag** is cut and Balbir Singh puts it in the cooker, while his father transfers the grated carrots to a deep pan with a little oil. The **saag** has to be cooked until tender, while the carrots dry up and roast themselves into a delicious red colour.

Balbir Singh expertly adds the spices to the **saag** and then tempers it with garlic and ginger. Pavneet is the quickest. In no time, he has added salt and red chilli powder to the **raita** from the masala box, and then the aromatic roasted whole **jeera** (cumin). For garnishing it, he says he has chopped fresh coriander. But everyone knows he got his mother outside to do it for him.

On the other stove, Arjan Singh adds sugar to the **halwa**, and one of his daughters-in-law edges her way in and adds crumbled **khoya** on it. He refuses to say which one of his daughters-in-law is the best cook—with four of them, he is always diplomatic. Pavneet runs to get everybody water and his older cousin, dancer-choreographer Monty, carries in a plate of radish slices and green chillies. That’s when everyone realises how the men have been almost patriotic with the food—orange **halwa**, white **raita**, green **saag**, the colours of the flag.

**Makki ki roti** is, however, served by Saravjeet—“that’s something I have never been able to make,” says Arjan Singh whose speciality till date is **missi roti**, a mixture of chopped onions, dal and flour. Balbir Singh adds the lemon pickle he recently made to the table. Dollops of ghee are added to the **saag**, already garnished with ginger julienes. It melts in your mouth, and if you are not careful, you will eat till sundown.

—**Vatsala Kaul**
Beat the heat

Shameem Akthar tells you how to stay cool in a long, sweltering summer with gentle yogic exercises

LONGER DAYS DURING summer keep motivation high towards all forms of physical activity, including yoga. But summer’s scorching heat can also sap. Ancient sages realised this and listed various suggestions for yoga during extreme weather.

Summer, they warned, was not an ideal time to initiate practice. If you start learning in summer, it is advisable to start with gentle poses, like the pavan muktasana series, to help the body adjust. Otherwise, it will interpret any strenuous new activity as stress, and react negatively with ill health and inflammation.

Even for advanced practitioners, the time of practice is prescribed: early mornings are the best time. If you miss the brhamamuharta, the hour of creation from 4 am to 6 am, the next period is just before your breakfast, between 8 am to 10 am and later, in the evening, between 4 pm and 6 pm. This is based on the body’s biological clock, which determines the rise and drop of blood pressure, body temperature, hormonal flow, fluid balance and organ functions. All of this determines your energy levels and your moods, which also affect motivation and the discipline required for exercise.

Breathing practices (pranayama) must also always be done in the mornings since they can be extremely demanding. It is also advised to break up your practice, so that you do not do asana and pranayama one after another. A gap of 30 minutes is advised.

There are several practices advocated for their cooling impact. Most of the wisdom behind them comes from the observation of nature. The sashanka pose, named after a hare, comes from watching how the animal cooled off the stress of a life-threatening chase. It is also named after the outline of a hare on the moon, implying a cooling effect. The cooling (sheetali) breath came from watching canines cool off by hanging out their tongues. All these practices create a visible drop in blood temperature. But they also have a cooling effect on the brain. Therefore, they are not just used to handle physical heat but also mental exasperation, like anger and bad temper, which are fallouts of extreme heat.

Several practices, though, are best avoided when the heat peaks. These include the stomach lock (agnisara kriya) that fans the digestive fire. Heating pranayama like bellows breath (bhastrika) or skull-cleanser (kapalabhati) must be done with caution and only under expert guidance since these hike the blood pressure which is already reacting to heat. Again, it is essential to cool down after the practice by lying down in the corpse pose (shavasana) for five to 10 minutes so that the build-up of lactic acid waste (blood lactate) is cleared to allow energy levels to swing back to normal.

** Yogic moves **

** The cooling breath (sheetali pranayama) **

Sit up straight. Shut your eyes, as you must for all breathing practices. Fold your tongue as you would when whistling. Inhale through the mouth. Relax the tongue and lips, then exhale through the nostrils. You will feel the coldness of the breath entering the lungs. Keep your attention on this and the cooling effect of the breath on the mind and body. Repeat three to nine times. This is an ideal practice before sleeping as well as before meditation.

It also controls hunger, reduces body heat, balances stomach acids and lowers blood pressure.

** Caution: ** Because one is breathing through the mouth, this practice must never be done in a polluted atmosphere.

Shameem Akthar is a Mumbai-based yoga acharya. If you have any queries for her, mail us or email at contact.mag@harmonyindia.org

(Please consult your physician before following advice given here)
बूंद बूंद में विश्वास
ELECTRIFYING

Are you ready to be zapped by technology? Rapid-fire bursts of low-voltage electricity can bring hope to people suffering from epilepsy, paralysis, depression and other diseases, according to a feature in Business Week magazine. Using advances in pacemaker technology, doctors wire devices emitting micro-shocks and electrical signals to the right spots in the patient’s brain, and the tiny jolts of electricity have markedly positive effects. For instance, in people with bladder incontinence, a device in the abdomen pulses the spinal nerve as it emerges from the lower spinal chord, causing the bladder to tighten. A patient suffering from post-stroke paralysis would have a device embedded in his chest, stimulating part of the fibrous membrane surrounding the brain. The voltage is delivered by wires running up the neck and through the skull to a site directly above the area damaged. Unlike most drugs, these implants produce few side effects and save money on hospitalisation. They can also tackle problems that can’t always be treated with drugs. Many in the medical community predict that such implants could become as common as cardiac devices. However, the research is at the initial stage and it will take time to determine how these devices work in the long run. If early-stage experiments prove successful, ways to tackle Alzheimer’s disease, obsessive-compulsive disorders, bulimia, and other neurological ailments would be next on the agenda.

SOY IT LOUD

Isoflavone, a chemical abundant in the soy plant, has long been believed to ward off hot flashes in menopausal women, but the lack of empirical data held many doctors back from endorsing it wholeheartedly. Now, the medicinal benefits of soybeans may finally be explained in an ongoing study at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston, reports Science Daily. The study is investigating the effect of isoflavones in reducing high blood pressure in menopausal women. Another two-year study is examining the effect of soy isoflavones on osteoporosis in menopausal women. Also being examined is the effect of isoflavones on the production of nitric oxide, a chemical that reduces the tendency of blood to clot. The six-week trial will administer enriched isoflavones to patients, whose blood pressure will be monitored for a 24-hour period.

KICK THAT BUTT

Add to your life expectancy by quitting smoking immediately and making sure you have a daily tipple, says John McCallum, dean of social and health sciences, University of Western Sydney. He presented the latest results from an ongoing study of silvers at a recent conference in Australia, showing that smoking cut 22 months from men’s lives, and 15 from women’s. Being a teetotaller was almost as detrimental, shortening the lifespan of men by nine months and women by five.
EYE-OPENER

American scientists have identified a genetic link to macular degeneration, which could lead to early identification and treatment of the main cause of blindness among seniors, reported Science magazine. Age-related macular degeneration (AMD) blurs the vision in the macula, the part of the eye that perceives the details at the centre of one’s vision. Affecting an estimated 15 per cent of those reaching 75, there is no effective treatment yet for AMD. A team from Rockefeller University in New York examined more than 100,000 variations of gene sequences to identify a specific variation in the gene CFH, located in a region of chromosome 1. This variation could increase the risk of developing AMD in an individual by three to seven times. Two other research teams, from the University of Texas in Dallas and Vanderbilt University Medical Centre in Nashville, Tennessee, were able to confirm the conclusions of the first team in their examinations of chromosome 1. Together, the three studies suggest that this genetic variation could explain 20 per cent to 60 per cent of AMD cases.

SUPER MILK?

The Raika, a community of camel breeders that lives in the hills as well as desert areas of Mewar, Godhwar and Malva in Rajasthan, could hold the key to one of medical science’s great quests: combating diabetes. Not a single case has ever been reported in the tribe, and the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) has launched two studies to find out why. The decision to undertake the studies was taken after data collected from the Desert Medicine Research Centre, ICMR’s regional centre in Jodhpur, confirmed the phenomenon. “The Raika showed amazing tolerance to glucose,” says Dr N K Ganguly, director general, ICMR. “But the reasons are still unknown.” ICMR has decided to pursue two separate lines of inquiry: the first will try to determine whether a specific gene gives the Raika immunity. The second study will examine the role of camel milk. “The only way in which the Raika are different is that they still drink camel milk,” adds Ganguly. The ICMR has a clear lead to follow. Previous studies have pointed out that camel milk seems to contain an insulin-like protein, which appears capable of passing through the stomach without being destroyed by acids.

SLEEP TIGHT

When it comes to the bedroom, middle-aged women just can’t get enough. Sleep, that is. Women in their 50s are most often sleep-deprived, being kept awake by hot flashes, worries about children, and their partner’s snoring. “Women should move out of the room rather than suffer,” insists Sara Arber, professor of sociology at Sussex University, UK. Her findings, with co-researcher Jenny Hislop, are based on surveys of 1,500 women in the UK, as well as 140 interviews with women and further interviews with couples. The good news: sleep comes more easily to women in their 60s as the worries of jobs, teenage children and finances ease.
STAYING ALIVE!

DON'T WORRY, BE HAPPY

Having a laid-back attitude to life can help you live to be 100, say researchers. A new Australian study has found that centenarians have a special ability to cope with stress. The study, presented at the second International Conference on Healthy Ageing and Longevity held in Brisbane in March, is the first in Australia to examine a centenarian’s personality. Most of the 24 centenarians interviewed for the study did not feel that their lives had been stressful—though some had been to war, or had been left alone while their husbands went off to war; or had lived through the Great Depression. The findings bolster a 1999 Harvard study that noted that centenarians were good at dealing with emotional stress, calling them “stress shedders”. These are people who don’t dwell on the past, have a sense of humour, a strong work ethic, engaging personality and deep religious beliefs. The number of centenarians around the world is projected to increase to 2.2 million by 2050. In 1999, there were 145,000.

COUNT THE YEARS

Long life in a pill? It could happen. A pill containing the hormone thyroxine is being developed and Scottish scientists claim it could extend human life by up to 30 years. Professor John Speakman from Aberdeen University has been awarded a £450,000 grant to investigate how the body’s metabolism can be altered to extend life. His team found that mice with a higher metabolic rate live longer, aided by large amounts of the hormone thyroxine, which is produced in the thyroid. The hormone also limits free radicals, which can damage body tissue. Professor Speakman says human trials could start within a decade.

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Put away the past

The smoke of yesterday can make it impossible for you to see the present, says Osho. Open your eyes to the now.

WHEN YOU ACT, YOU ARE always acting through the past. You are acting out of the conclusions that you have arrived at in the past—how can you be spontaneous? Your eyes are so full of the past, the smoke of the past
is so great that seeing is impossible, you cannot see! You are blind because of the smoke, blind because of the past conclusions, blind because of knowledge.

The knowledgeable man is the most blind man in the world. Because he functions out of his knowledge, he does not see what the case is. There is a famous story: There were two temples in Japan, both enemies to each other. The priests were so antagonistic that if they came across each other on the road, they would not even look at each other. But each priest had a small boy to serve them. One priest said to his boy, “Remember, the other temple is our enemy. Never talk to the boy of the other temple. They are dangerous people—avoid them like the plague!”

The boy was tired of listening to great sermons. He could not understand them. There was nobody to play with, nobody to talk to. And when he was told, “Don’t talk to the boy of the other temple,” great temptation arose in him. That’s how temptation arises. That day he could not avoid talking to the other boy. When he saw him on the road, he asked him, “Where are you going?”

The boy was a little philosophical. He said, “Going? There is nobody who comes and goes! It is happening—wherever the wind takes me.” He had heard the master say many times that that’s how a Buddha lives. So the boy said, “I am a dead leaf. Wherever the wind takes me…”

The other boy was struck dumb. He was really embarrassed and felt, “My master was right—these are dangerous people. I had asked a simple question: ‘Where are you going?’ A simple answer would have done.” The boy went back and told his master, “I am sorry, you had prohibited me, but I didn’t listen to you. In fact, because of your prohibition I was tempted. I just asked a simple question, ‘Where are you going?’ And he started saying strange things: ‘Who comes? Who goes?’”

The master said, “I told you! Tomorrow, stand in the same place, and ask him again, ‘Where are you going?’ and when he replies, you simply say, ‘Yes, you are a dead leaf, so am I. But when the wind is not blowing, where are you going? Then where can you go?’ That will embarrass him—he has to be defeated.”

The boy got up early, prepared his answer. Then he asked the boy, “Where are you going?” The other boy said, “Wherever the legs will take me.” Now what? Now to talk about the wind would be irrelevant. Again crestfallen, he thought, “This boy knows some strange things.” Hearing this, the master said, “I told you they are dangerous. Tomorrow, you ask again, and when he says, ‘Wherever my legs take me,’ tell him, ‘If you had no legs, then?’” The next day, the boy asked, “Where are you going?” And the other boy said, “I am going to the market.”

Man ordinarily functions out of the past—and life goes on changing. That’s why life is confusing to the knowledgeable person. He has ready-made answers; the Bhagavad Gita, the Koran, the Bible, the Vedas. He knows all the answers. But life never raises the same question again; hence the knowledgeable person always falls short.

Acharya Rajneesh (Osho’s name before 1972) remains one of the most talked about modern gurus. He preached and wrote on diverse subjects—spiritual, religious, physical and metaphysical. Osho died in 1990. Excerpt from Awareness - The Key to Living in Balance; Rs 195
A web of friends

Sachin Kalbag helps the Purohits connect with silvers in India—and across the world

The Purohits had not been themselves of late. During our walks, I had noticed a certain strain in their voices, a stillness in their eyes. I decided to find out why. One evening, I dropped by their place on my way home from work. Mrs Purohit was delighted to see me. She sat me down for a cup of coffee and we talked. “I miss having friends my own age,” she confessed. “Most of our old friends have moved abroad to be with their children. And some have passed away.” Mr Purohit remained silent. “But you can chat with your kids on the Internet,” I said a little too enthusiastically. “Yes, and that’s a blessing,” she said. “But they don’t have that much time. And they live differently, they don’t really speak our language. I don’t want to burden them with our silly concerns.” Mr Purohit moved closer on the sofa to sit next to his wife. “We don’t just need the World Wide Web,” he said. “We need a web of friends too.”

It was one of those moments when you want to hit yourself on the head with a hard object. Over the past year, I had helped the Purohits set up their computer, connect to the Internet, send and receive email, chat with their family, pay bills, shop and bank online, even find a groom for their niece. But I had neglected to tell them about online communities. Boy, I felt stupid. “Why are you looking so troubled?” Mrs Purohit asked me. I explained to them that I should have told them about online communities. The sound of that perked up Mr Purohit—he had come across the term when he was surfing but wasn’t too sure what they were.
Online communities work the same way as everyday communities. They help people meet each other and bond in ways only a community member can understand. “You need an online community for senior citizens,” I told them. Mr Purohit was sceptical. “It can never replace flesh-and-blood friends,” he said. But Mrs Purohit, always the one to take the lead in making friends, shushed him with “they are flesh-and-blood people, what if you can’t see them face to face?” and led me to the computer.

The first site we visited was clubelders.com. This Indian website for people above 50 allows senior citizens to interact with each other, post articles on issues that concern them, post messages on the discussion forum to talk to each other directly, and read articles of interest. The topics range from travel to technology, money to hobbies.

Mrs Purohit loved the ‘E-Pals’ section where like-minded people “reach out a friendly hand”, as the site puts it. The other members were her age, seemed to have similar concerns and, most important, had similar interests, “unlike my grandchildren who speak to me about Digimons and i-pods”. She added the site to her ‘Favourites’ list and proclaimed loudly—for Mr Purohit’s benefit, I’m sure—“This Aveek Bose, age 60, who loves writing poetry, sounds very interesting.” That got his attention. “Aveek who, that. So we went surfing again, finding lots of online communities for silvers: seniornews.com, wiredseniors.com, seniorsite.com, elderswithoutwalls.com…the list was endless. Mr Purohit was very impressed by bb.org.uk, a ‘Baby Boomer Bistro’, while his wife, not surprisingly, was enchanted by coolgrandma.com.

I figured I could leave now, both of them were far more animated than I’d seen them in a while. But just as I was getting up, Mrs Purohit said, “I saw the word ‘blogging’ on the Cool Grandma site,” she said. “What’s that?” I sank back into my chair and explained.

A blog is an abbreviation for a Web Log, where Internet users can pen down their thoughts about anything. It is like an online diary; a virtual version of the paper diary you keep. One person can write down his or her thoughts on a website and others can respond. A blog, therefore, has the potential to become a strong online community.

“Show me how,” said Mrs Purohit. We went to two good blogging sites, blogger.com and livejournal.com, both free. You create a blog account just like you would an email account. Mrs Purohit could write anything she wanted to on her blog, and then get her friends to read it. Once they were hooked, maybe they could start their own. “Imagine all my friends from the US and the UK talking to each other using blogs,” said Mrs Purohit.

Meanwhile, her husband had found another blog called seniorcitizens.com, by a silver lady called Jolene, with a vast amount of information on issues concerning seniors across the world. Mr Purohit spent a lot of time on the site, much to his wife’s impatience. “I am looking for a picture of this Jolene,” he said, when she asked him about it. “Why?” she asked indignantly. “After all, they are flesh-and-blood people like you said,” was his smart reply. I left before things got heated.

Sachin Kalbhor is executive editor of Digit, India's premier technology magazine
Next innings

Experts at www.naukri.com, India’s leading job portal, answer your questions on post-retirement jobs

Q I am a 54-year-old retired defence person. My son is a commerce graduate and wants to open a Mother Dairy booth in Gurgaon in my name. Can you tell me where he should apply? Are there any eligibility conditions that I must meet?

If your son wants to open a Mother Dairy booth in your name, there is no time to lose. He must apply before you turn 55, because that is the age limit.

There are certain other necessary eligibility conditions that you must meet. Your rank should have been at least a Naik and not beyond the junior commissioned officers’ level. Your time served in the armed forces should not have been less than 10 years, and there should not have been a gap of more than six years from the time you retired to the time of application. As far as education is concerned, you must hold an Army first-class certificate or its equivalent, or a class VIII pass certificate. You also need to make a security deposit of Rs 40,000.

Application forms can be obtained from the Directorate General Resettlement, an inter-service organisation functioning directly under the Ministry of Defence. They can also be downloaded from www.dgrindia.com, where you must click on ‘Self Employment Directorate’ and then select ‘Item 12’ for detailed information on how to open a Mother Dairy booth. Interviews are held at the Mother Dairy office in Delhi.

If you are found suitable, you will have to undergo training for four to six weeks. After that time, you will be allotted the booth on a commission basis. In case you do not meet the eligibility conditions, your dependant—son or wife—may apply, but you must accompany them on the day of the interview.

Q I am a 60-year-old widow suffering from polio. My sons are grown up with families of their own. Though I have been a housewife all my life, I want to start a career now. I do not want to join the corporate world nor do I want to be involved in a job that requires a lot of travelling. Can I sit at home and work for a non-governmental organisation? I hold a Master’s degree in accountancy and have always been good with figures. Can I put this to use now?

It’s a good idea to work with non-governmental organisations, many of which are non-profit voluntary bodies. This sector offers diverse opportunities and has been paying fairly well of late. However, if you are looking for a formal qualification as a social worker, a Master’s degree in social work is recommended. Since you already hold a Master’s degree in accounts, you should highlight this area clearly in your resume, and enhance the qualification by acquiring some basic computer skills. The combination will help you find work that you can easily do from home.

Q I am a 70-year-old retired banker who likes reading finance magazines and business journals. I invest in shares and like to provide guidance to my relatives and friends on stocks. My hunches have proved correct on more than one occasion. I have always been enterprising and have been thinking of starting a business where I charge investors 1 per cent on every share purchased on my advice. I could start a firm or entertain calls at home and even give suggestions on the Internet. I would like to take your advice.

There is a lot of scope for individuals like you who think ‘out of the box’, have a passion for meeting people and developing relationships. You have a distinctive idea on how to make your interest in
number crunching and keeping abreast of financial trends pay. Opening a firm to dole out guidance on investment avenues is a great plan.

Initially, you will have to invest in promoting the venture, but later word-of-mouth publicity will ensure that you get a steady stream of clients. Charging clients as per the shares they buy is a good idea as opposed to receiving commissions from selling mutual funds or insurance products. It will also ensure unbiased advice on your part, giving you greater credibility. Alternately, you always have the option of applying to companies as an investment consultant or advisor. All the best!

ROCKING AT 60

Sumit Roy, 60, is known as the ‘Nat King Cole of Kolkata’. A familiar face at city nightclubs and stage shows, Roy has sung over 3,000 songs in English, Bengali, Hindi and Punjabi in the past five years. His versatility is apparent when he plays Hindustani classical raag bhairavi on his piano, supported by the mridangam, tabla and sitar. However, it’s Roy’s lilting African-American classics that keep his audience asking for more.

Shifting track from being an entrepreneur—Roy ran a high-pressure piping business for 30 years—to a full-time musician was not easy. He waited till his family commitments were met before he closed down his business five years ago. Till then, Roy nursed his passion for music by singing at informal gatherings. Now that both his children are well settled, Roy is making the best use of his retirement and indulging his true calling.

When he is not entertaining audiences live in clubs and at shows, he composes music for ad films and documentaries. Roy has also composed background scores for educational CD-ROMs for children and a BBC documentary titled Calcutta Chronicle. Recently, he finished scoring the theme music for Rotary International—it’s now being used worldwide.

“Music is my passion and it gives me both mental and economic satisfaction,” he says. Roy makes about Rs 25,000 from an evening’s performance at a five-star hotel. He typically performs about 10 days a month during the winter season; once or twice a month in summers. During Durga Puja season, he gets to perform for a whole fortnight in a row. Now, he’s busy preparing for a statewide road show, and looks forward to the day when a music company asks him to cut his own album.

—Dipannita Ghosh Biswas

Readers are requested to send in their queries to contact.mag@harmonyindia.org
Health comes calling

Members learn more about Ayurveda

ANCIENT WISDOM TOOK CENTRE-STAGE AT
the Harmony Interactive Centre in Girgaum,
Mumbai, last month. Dr Archana Shukla, diabetes
specialist, Ayush Therapy Centre, a part of the
Hindustan Lever Group, was invited to speak on the
benefits of Ayurveda.

With around 60 members and staff listening
expectantly, Dr Shukla described the Ayurvedic
concept of the tridosha (vata, pitta and kapha). “Ayur-
veda says that the body is made up of tissues (dhatu),
worst products (mala), and energy forces (dosha),” she
said. “It is the function of the tridosha to assist all
tissues and remove worst products from the body.”

Dr Shukla answered queries on many topics, from
arthritis, premature greying and diabetes to
cholesterol and heart disease. She recommended
Chyawanprash, taken in the morning on an empty
stomach, as an effective health tonic, and prescribed a
variety of home remedies—turmeric for cough;
seaweed oil for joint pain; mustard oil for strong teeth;
natural digestive like sanjeevani buti, triphala,
asvagandha and shatawani tablets and, best of all, warm
water for indigestion and constipation; and fenugreek powder for diabetes and a healthy heart.

Dr Shukla also emphasised the need for seniors to
have an established daily routine (rincharya). Smita
Pawaskar, a 64-year-old-member, found this advice
valuable. “A daily routine teaches you how to keep a
record of your diet and helps you eat a balanced
meal,” she said. Another member Mahesh Hadkar,
62, who suffers from indigestion, found Dr Shukla’s
recommendation of lukewarm water with ajwain in
the morning very effective.

The response from members was so encouraging that
the centre is organising a second Ayurveda seminar
on popular demand in June, says Jyoti Wadmare,
social worker at the centre.

—Priyanka Deshpande

To know more about the centre and its activities,
call us at (022) 30976440/6441 or email
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HIREN MEHTA

Dr Shukla speaks at the centre

THIS MONTH

YOGA
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(men); 4-5 pm (women). Classes by instructors from
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MUSIC
Thursdays; bhajan from 4-5 pm. Marathi sugam
sangeet from 5-6 pm

GROUP THERAPY
Wednesdays; 4-5 pm (men); 5.15-6.15 pm (women)
By Dr Anjali Chabbria and Dr Sharita Shah

COMPUTERS
Monday to Saturday; 8-9.30 am and 6.30-8 pm

HOBBIES
May 2: 5.30-6.30 pm. Diya painting by Bhavna Dalal
May 7: 5-6 pm. Dance classes organised by
centre members
May 16: 5.30-6.30 pm. Warli painting workshop
by Bhavna Dalal

INTERACTIVE SESSIONS
May 13: 5.30-6.30 pm. Discussion on water
conservation by Ashok Gokhale from Eureka Forbes

COMMON BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION
May 30
Programmes are subject to last-minute changes

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Hamming it up

S N Rama Raju uses his amateur radio to pass time, make friends and, on occasion, help others during natural calamities, says Trina Mukherjee

S N Rama Raju tells you with great relish how he met one of his best friends in 1990. “I was on the radio, looking to hook up with someone I could chat with,” remembers the soft-spoken 70-year-old. “I heard a Malaysian, who identified himself as Raja, speaking to a Japanese man in English.” Rama Raju joined the conversation, introducing himself as a Tamilian from India. “After Raja discovered that I could speak in Tamil, he immediately switched over to his old mother tongue and we ended up having a long chat.” What began as a Sunday ritual of meeting ‘on air’ gradually developed into a long-lasting friendship between the two amateur radio operators and their families.

Born and brought up in Rajapalayam, a town close to Madurai, Rama Raju worked in a textile mill and later in a cottonseed oil extraction plant before joining a cement plant. “As a senior executive in the plant, I was quite busy and photography along with HAM radio allowed me to unwind and relax,” he says. In the late 1980s, he met a few HAMs who introduced him to the amateur radio community, a group of people that use radio transmitters and receivers to communicate with others across the world. They proudly call themselves HAMs—a term of fuzzy origin. Rama Raju was hooked, and obtained a license...
to operate an amateur radio in 1989. He then imported high frequency (HF) and very high frequency (VHF) sets from Japan and installed them at home in Rajapalayam.

Rama Raju is quick to dispel the notion that amateur radio is an expensive, elitist hobby. “I spent about Rs 25,000 on the HF and VHF sets in 1990,” he says. “There are simpler sets that cost less. One can even assemble a radio with a couple of frequency bands that will not cost more than Rs 5,000.” It’s not difficult to learn either. “If one is familiar with electronics, he can assemble and operate a radio by reading books and following the circuit diagrams. Any experienced HAM who can read circuit diagrams can guide a layman.”

Rama Raju is now retired, but never lonely. He says, “The radio offers me lots of opportunity to make friends.” He has many of them and they meet on air for a ‘rag chew’ or casual chit chat on “any subject under the sun except politics and other controversial matters”. Currently, he spends at least an hour in the morning and a good 30 to 40 minutes in the evenings on the radio. And he meticulously keeps a logbook of his radio encounters, complete with times and people met. His wife Sakuntala, 65, who initially felt that he was a tad too involved in his hobby, got her own license in 1990. The couple have no children. Now she often drops in for a chat with his friends on air.

Occasionally, HAMS meet face to face too—they call it an ‘eyeball’. Rama Raju recalls a HAM from Chennai who had a deep baritone. “I had imagined that he would be a burly six-footer with a barrel chest,” he says with a chuckle. “Once when I visited Chennai, I decided to go and meet him. A lean and slender man opened the door and I thought he was the son of my radio friend. I was flabbergasted when I realised that it was him.”

“Chatting on the Net is less satisfactory than talking to someone on the radio”

—S N Rama Raju

HAMSPEAK

73: best regards
88: hugs and/or kisses
Antenna party: HAMS gathering together to mount antennae
Barefoot: running your transmitter without an amplifier
Bird: satellite
Birdie: a signal produced within a radio
Boat anchor: A large, heavy, old radio
Bug: A mechanical keying device for transmitting Morse Code
DX: making contacts over long distances
Eyeball: face to face meeting
Homebrew: equipment that is homebuilt
LOS: loss of signal from a satellite
OM: ‘old man’, affectionate way to address a fellow HAM
Pink ticket: notice of rule violation
RX: receiver or receive
Rag chew: casual chit chat
Rubber duck: a flexible antenna
WX: weather
XYL: wife
YL: ‘young lady’, short for girlfriend

The HAM fraternity has its own share of glamour. “A few years ago, actor Kamal Hassan was camping in Kodai kanal for a film shoot,” says Rama Raju. “We had frequent radio contact during his stay there and he spoke about his trekking and wildlife adventures.” According to him, fellow HAMS include the late Rajiv Gandhi, Amitabh Bachchan, Sonia Gandhi, and the current Communications Minister Dayanidhi Maran, though this information is not verified.

For dedicated HAMS, however, there’s more to the radio than just rag chewing. “HAMS from our club rendered assistance in the tsunami-struck areas of
A BEGINNER’S GUIDE

How to become a HAM: There are a number of HAM clubs in India that regularly organise coaching to those interested. If you don’t have a club near your area, get in touch with the Amateur Radio Society of India (ARSI), Mumbai, or the National Institute of Amateur Radio (NIAR) in Hyderabad. For contact details, see page 79.

To get your licence, you need to pass an exam. Officials from the Ministry of Communications can be invited to conduct the exam at the local club premises if sufficient candidates (at least 15) are ready. The candidates can also go to the regional offices and appear for the exams. The questions will be based on basic radio theory and rules and regulations governing transceiver operations. Learning Morse code is a must for HF operation.

How to install your own radio in a flat or private colony: If you live in a house with lots of space around it, a good antenna system can be set up easily. People living in flats can erect a different type of antenna on the terrace. In the US, where neighbours can object to antennae, ‘invisible’ antennae are used. Metal posts, metal rainwater gutters and wires suspended in the attic can all be used as antennae. But they would not work as well as a well-designed system.

Safety rules: Most HAMs in India use a maximum of 100 watts during transmission. Many use less power. There is no danger in operating the radio transmitter in a room but the antenna outside radiates power that can give a nasty burn when touched during transmission. Be careful.

Monthly expenditure: The power consumed is not high. And the license fee to operate the transceiver is only Rs 100. There is no time limit to operate the radio.

Nagapattinam and Cuddalore in Tamil Nadu,” says Rama Raju with pride. “I used to monitor their signals for help and pass on the messages to local officials for action.” In fact, immediately after the tsunami knocked out regular communication channels in the Andamans, HAM radios were the only available resource for establishing contact with mainland India. HAM operators established emergency communications using their own radios and standby power sources like car batteries. Rama Raju adds that HAMs from cities like Bangalore, Mumbai, Hyderabad and Chennai have all helped in relaying emergency messages during the Bhopal gas tragedy, the Latur earthquake, cyclones in Orissa and floods in the Krishna and Godavari rivers.

It’s proof enough for Rama Raju that the HAM radio will never become obsolete. “I do chat on the Internet sometimes,” he says. “But it’s less satisfactory than talking to someone directly over the radio. Maybe I am prejudiced!”
Journey into your heart

Hugh and Colleen Gantzer lumber into the Kanha National Park on elephant-back and emerge with sharper vision and keener senses.
We love forests. We love the sighing oaks and high, whispering conifers of our Himalayan home in Mussoorie. We love the thorn-scrub forests of Gir where prides of lions recline with regal indolence; the soaring forests of the Andamans rising like impenetrable green walls from blazing-white, surf-singing beaches; and the dark mangrove forests of the Sunderbans where the goggle eyes of air-breathing mud skipper fish glow in the damp gloom like winking Christmas-tree lights. But the forests most woven into our childhood are those of the heart of India. Here, in the unforgettable magic of our fantasies, roamed Rudyard Kipling’s Mowgli the wolf-boy, Bhaloo his mentor, the hissing, hypnotic Kaa the python, Sher Khan, Bagheera, and “Cheer the kite, (who) brings home the night, which Mang, the bat, sets free.”

Legend has it that Kipling set his Jungle Book in the forests of what has now become the Kanha National Park. We drive into Kanha a little after midday. That’s when the forest is somnolent. There’s hardly a breath to stir the leaves of the trees, there’s no sound except the impatient rat-a-tat-tat of a determined woodpecker; and there’s enough time to book a short evening round on an elephant. We don’t push ourselves to see wildlife. We’re here to unwind, relax, slow down our heartbeats and breathing, let the measured rhythm of the forest embrace us, allow us quality time to discover each other all over again.

We check into our log hut raised on its short, wooden stumps, have lunch and then listen to the insect-strumming sounds of silence. It’s the most rejuvenating form of meditation we have ever experienced—possibly because it’s been built into our genetic memories. We are experiencing the sights, sounds, smell, tastes and feelings that our Stone Age ancestors did when they were still sharp-sensed dwellers in the wilderness.

So when we mount our elephant and lumber into the jungle, we wear clothes that merge with the forest, we communicate with each other by touch and slow signs, we respond to the subtle signals of our senses. That slight movement to the left is not a branch; it’s the antlers of a stag that is watching us warily. Why have the langur, in their grey fur coats, stopped feeding in the trees, dropping leaves and nuts to the herd of chital below? “Hock,” bark the grey monkeys. The spotted chital raise their heads. An alert spotted deer calls “Yip,” stamps its hoof. And then they’re off—the monkeys bounding through the tops of the trees, the herd of deer fleeing through the speckled shadows of the forest. A slight blurring of the shadows? That’s all we’ll probably see of a hunting leopard, the cause of all the panic.

The light softens, sunset gilds the leaves, darkness begins to rise out of the forest floor. A family of wild pig crosses our path, a
heavy mother waddling in front of her school-line of striped piglets. Their burly father turns, faces us, sharp teeth curving out of an ugly snout. “Mock not the boar in his lair,” advised Kipling’s Law of the Jungle. We plod on. An owl flies silently past, perches on a dried branch, follows our progress with large eyes on a head that swivels around like a creature from another world.

We are in another world, even in our log cabin. We might see a wildlife movie if there are enough others interested. We certainly feel hungrier than we have for a long time. We have shed our worries and anxieties like dead skin. Our senses have been charging us with new sensations; every tree around us is pumping out more oxygen than a powerful air-conditioner, absorbing our carbon dioxide. There is no pollution. And after dinner, when we see the moon rising above the trees and flooding a glade with silver, and we hear the jackals singing, we feel younger and more zestful than we have in a long, long, while.

The next morning, after a rejuvenating night, we are out on a jeep ride, warmly clad because the microclimate of the forest can be unusually chill. Mist spreads like tattered, white veils snagged on the trees and bushes. But now we notice that our vision has become sharper, our other senses keener, we are more alert.

We spot wild dogs, the dhole, hunting as a team to bring down a barasingha (swamp deer) fawn. The barasingha are Kanha’s greatest conservation success story, up from an endangered herd of 66. And did we see that black rock move? We concentrate. It’s one of the rather shy and night-loving sloth bears. Not many visitors have seen them in Kanha. We find ourselves enjoying the smaller things too—a black-and-white porcupine, rustling its quiver of spines; a mongoose, scuttling hunch-backed like Groucho Marx; a brilliantly plumaged jungle cock, lording it over his hard-working, dowdy hens.

Suddenly, our driver stops and leans down to peer at the damp jungle path. There, very clearly, are the pugmarks of a tiger. Our hearts thump, our adrenalin pumps, our breaths shorten, we experience the sort of buzz we last felt when we were very young and saw an object of intense desire. At that moment, in fact, our bodies have become very young, burning up hidden reserves of energy to answer a stimulating challenge. And then we see it. Rising from the bushes where it had been resting, a tiger gets to its feet. We hold our breath, go closer. Instinctively, the acrid taste of danger floods into our mouths. The tiger turns, snarls and swiftly, like an elongated streak of tawny stripes, leaps into the jungle leaving only the searing memory of our wild encounter.

It has also left a long-lasting impact on our well being. We have tapped the vitality of the very heart of things, in Kanha.
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The guiding principle

Ashoka Gupta was recently felicitated for being the oldest Girl Guide in West Bengal. At 93, she looks back fondly on her days of adventure with Anjana Basu.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

When I was 15, I began to notice that other girls in my school, St Margaret’s in Kolkata, were wearing blue saris for special classes on Wednesdays.

Curious about what they were doing, I signed up as a ‘bulbul’, which is what the first grade of Girl Guides is called in India. Guiding in India began in 1911. Initially, it was only for European or Anglo-Indian girls. If I remember correctly, the first Indian Guide Company started in Pune in 1916. Around the 1920s, there was a problem about taking the pledge.

This is how it went then: “Ready to serve my king, country and God”. Many of my fellow guides simply refused to take the oath because they wanted the authorities to remove any mention of the British king with its overtones of imperial domination!
These are the pledges I took in 1928:

- I promise to do my best
- To do my duty to God and my country
- To keep the law of the bulbul flock and
- To do a good turn every day

These principles have stayed with me. Even after I was married [to Saibal Gupta, an ICS officer], I managed to find guiding activities in schools wherever he was posted. We moved from Rajshahi to Faridpur, to Krishnagar and then to Chittagong. In 1956, the movement took me abroad to the US, where I remember meeting victims of the nuclear explosion at Hiroshima.

**DAYS OF THUNDER**

Hindu-Muslim riots were tearing Bengal apart in the 1940s. Nellie Sengupta, the British-born wife of freedom fighter Jatindramohan Sengupta, banded others through social service and guiding. I became part of the All India Women’s Conference. We visited refugee camps and homes for unattached women in places as far flung as Jalandhar to ensure that people displaced by Partition were looked after.

**MY FAMILY**

I am proud of them and their commitment to making a difference to people’s lives. My mother, Jyotirmayee Debi, was widowed at 24. She educated herself and went on to become a fine writer in Bengali. My husband dared to risk the wrath of the British by refusing to order a lathi charge against the Salt Movement agitators in Contai in 1942. Shakuntala, my eldest daughter, was a well-known Girl Guide. My son Parthasadan was a respected professor of economics in Delhi. Both Shakuntala and Parthasadan are no more. Kasturi, my second daughter, is an IAS officer and lives in Delhi with her husband. Upala, my third, is married to an American and lives in the US. I have seven grandchildren, mostly living and working abroad.

**“Being a guide is not just about outdoor activities. It’s about compassion and working to alter lives for the better”**

us together at Chittagong to help the victims. She was the president of the Congress during the civil disobedience movement. We would meet fleeing villagers at railway stations and urge them to go back. In frustration, we wrote to Mahatma Gandhi who was then camping in Choumuhani, a well-known trade centre in Noakhali district. On December 16, 1946, we met him and he advised us to go and stay in the villages with the victims.

I was a mother of three then. I trekked with my 18-month-old son to the Harijan village of Tumchar. My task was to write an account of our activities accurately each day and contact the Union Board for Rehabilitation. We visited all the homes in the area, speaking to the women and checking on family members. I was at the camp for seven months. My work there was made simpler by my training as a guide. I knew how to swim, row a boat, cycle and use sticks and knives. We had even been taught how to dig trenches for toilets.

When news of Partition came, I returned to take care of my other two children. That was the time when my husband was transferred to Calcutta. He was a member of the Partition Committee. I continued to look for opportunities to be of use to
STUNT QUEEN
Fearless Nadia
By Dorothee Wenner
Penguin; Rs 295; 245 pages

Riyad Wadia’s documentary film Fearless – The Hunterwali Story, based on the life of Nadia, Indian cinema’s stunt legend without a double, amazed the public at the 1994 Berlin Film Festival. So much so, that the writer of this book hung a photo of the actress over her desk after the experience. For Nadia’s story, Wenner contacted Riyad, Nadia’s great-nephew, in Mumbai and gained access to tin chests full of studio plans, newspaper cuttings, photos and screenplays.

Named Mary Evans by her parents Margaret and Herbert (a Scottish soldier in the British Army), Nadia joined a Russian circus to shed her baby fat and christened herself ‘Nadia’ on the advice of a tarot card reader. Underpaid and exploited as a ballet dancer, Nadia left the troupe to try her luck alone. In 1934, she met the Wadia brothers — Homi and Jamshed — two of the 10 producers in Bombay who hadn’t gone bankrupt while shifting from silent movies to sound films. Even before her death in 1992, Nadia remembered the horror in Jamshed’s eyes when he first met her. He hadn’t expected such a white, blonde and large woman. To salvage the situation, Nadia told him she was a big name in the world of theatre. When Jamshed said he hadn’t heard of her, she told him she hadn’t heard of him either.

“I think he decided to hire me because of that,” Nadia told Homi Wadia, now 88, who later married the actress.

Nadia made Indian cinema-goers “aware of legs” and acted in her first film, Lal-e-Yaman, in 1933. In 1935, she became a cult stunt figure with Hunterwali. In all her films, Nadia was like Robin Hood, avenging the poor, beating up her enemies, riding like the devil and swinging on chandeliers, wearing scanty bodysuits, a mask and a whip her trademarks. Punjab Mail, Bambaiwali, Jungle Princess, Hunterwali Ki Beti, Tigress, Toofan Queen and Diler Daku, among others, followed. All these were counted as cheap entertainment for the masses comprising factory workers and tonga drivers. However, this didn’t affect her popularity.

With Nadia’s life, Fearless Nadia charts the history of Indian cinema—the days when actresses were considered educated prostitutes to the days when they still have it hard without song and dance. The book also highlights the success of Wadia Movietone in India, the World War II censorship on films, wartime inflation and the transfer of the biggest studio in Bombay to filmmaker V Shantaram.

Wenner first wrote the book in German. But Riyad, the person who helped her the most, didn’t know the language. Hence, the English translation by Rebecca Morrison. Unfortunately, Riyad still couldn’t read it. He succumbed to AIDS last year, at the age of 36.

—Meeta Bhatti
BODY LANGUAGE
*The Alchemy of Desire*
By Tarun Tejpal
HarperCollins; Rs 500; 518 pages

*Body Language*
*The Alchemy of Desire*
By Tarun Tejpal
HarperCollins; Rs 500; 518 pages

whenever Fizz, short for Fiza, enters the pages, she leaves you a little breathless. The sex—and there’s a lot of it in this book—is very graphic, never pornographic. But just when you are about to forget that Tejpal is that Tarun Tejpal, the hard-nosed journalist known best for Tehelka, he slips in an exquisite paragraph or two that reveals his knowledge of, and contempt for, the world: the banality of CNN, the dog-eats-dog-and-gets-eaten-by-other-dog world of journalism, the moral bankruptcy of our politicians. Though the book tends to ramble through the end, Tejpal manages to make you laugh, sigh, and break your heart.
—Arati Rajan Menon

BORDER CROSSING
*Tokyo Cancelled*
By Rana Dasgupta
HarperCollins; Rs 395; 383 pages

Airports are curious places, destinations for chance encounters and fleeting friendships, pit stops for the world-weary. The recent Tom Hanks film *The Terminal* told the tale of one person stuck in an airport; *Tokyo Cancelled*, Rana Dasgupta’s debut novel, is about 13 of them, stranded in an unnamed country, when Tokyo, where they’re all headed, becomes snow-bound.

Taking a leaf from Geoffrey Chaucer’s pilgrims in *Canterbury Tales*, they take turns telling stories as a way of occupying themselves while they wait for the next flight out. The characters are bizarre and their accounts often darkly comic—a Japanese businessman obsessed with a lifelike doll, his creation; Marlboro, a boy in Lagos, who becomes involved with a sinister gang and is forced to kill the father he has never known; a wingless bird that walks from Marseilles to Odessa to tell a woman that her lover’s ship has been detained; and in New York, Robert De Niro’s illegitimate son (conceived with a Chinese woman in a laundromat) who falls in love with a woman who turns into a department store when she eats magic cookies!

These are fables of love and obsession, loss and upheaval, pervaded by a sense of dislocation, that yo-yo with relish between the concrete and the surreal. The cold fluorescent lights of a waiting lounge leave little space for empathy, or sympathy, and Dasgupta treats his subjects with cynicism, almost harshness, elevating the book from fairytale to incisive commentary. Raised in Britain, he studied in France and the US before moving to Delhi in 2001—qualifications, perhaps, to write a book about the underbelly of the ‘we-are-all-one’ global village.
—Arati Rajan Menon
In **OBITUARIES - DEATH AT MY DOORSTEP** (Roli Books; Rs 295; 170 pages), **Kushwant Singh** dwells on the dead, as only he knew them. Fellow writers like Mulk Raj Anand, Nirad C Chaudhuri and R K Narayan appear warts and all. People like Sanjay Gandhi, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and Lord Mountbatten fare no better as the 90-year-old goes on to deconstruct them in his inimitable style. And when it comes to women, he takes special glee in painting them in his vivid hues of malice, affection and brutal honesty. The more poignant essays are those that linger on long-lost friends or daily companions, like Pakistani statesman Manzur Qadir, dahi-bhalla supplier Kishan Lal and Singh’s pet dog Simba. The collection of essays begins with his own obituary—he wrote it when he was in his 20s.

The reactions India evokes are complex,” writes author **Pankaj Mishra**, the editor of **INDIA IN MIND** (Vintage; Rs 590; 335 pages). Everybody has their own take on India—from George Orwell to E M Forster, William Somerset Maugham to Gore Vidal—and this collection of 25 excerpts and essays captures some of them. Some may annoy you, like Italian filmmaker Paolo Pasolini’s description of Calcutta as a funereal ballet, others like American author Paul Bowles’ candid description of his time in Indian villages will make you nod along in understanding. While some of the writing, like Ruth Prawer Jhabvala’s, is a little mushy, most of it is outstanding. Top picks: George Orwell’s *Shooting the Elephant* and Welsh travel writer Jan Morris’ *Mrs Gupta Never Rang*.

**Vaihav Purandare’s SACHIN TENDULKAR - A DEFINITIVE BIOGRAPHY** (Roli Books; Rs 395; 426 pages) has all you’d need to know about the ‘Master Blaster’, from statistics and replays of classic innings to interesting anecdotes. At times, the book reads like a cluster of sports stories strung together but that won’t deter diehard fans. The young journalist, who already has a book on the Shiv Sena under his belt, does a good job tracing Tendulkar’s young days: his days of galli cricket, his training under coach Ramakant Acharekar, his first taste of batting success as a school cricketer in Sharadashram, and his first brush with rejection—he had fancied himself as a fast bowler but Dennis Lillee eliminated him outright at the MRF Pace Bowlers’ Academy. With plenty of cricket still left in Tendulkar, Purandare might need to do another ‘definitive’ job after 20 years or so.

**Fans** of **James Patterson** already know Dr Alex Cross very well. The black homicide detective from the Washington Police Force, a tough guy with a soft heart, is the central character in most of Patterson’s taut thrillers. In **FOUR BLIND MICE** (Headline; Rs 200; 404 pages), Cross is back, investigating a serious of suspicious murder convictions—all the accused are army officers who served in Vietnam. As Cross and his partner John Sampson infiltrate the closed world of the military, you sit back and enjoy the ride: a sharp plot, smooth narrative, sexy love interests, and villains who are so bad they’re good.

*All titles available at Oxford Bookstore, Mumbai, Bangalore and Kolkata, and on www.oxfordbookstore.com*
A bumpy ride

Journeys can be hard on silvers who are physically challenged.

Amita Malik writes about some common travelling woes

NO MATTER WHAT ONE’S AGE, from infancy to old age, travel one must. By bullock cart, cycle, horse, two-wheeler, three-wheeler, car, bus, train, helicopter, plane, ship—just name it.

I think the most relaxed journey I have ever taken was by boat to England from Bombay in the 1950s. It took about a fortnight, and if there were choppy seas and fellow passengers getting sick there was also moonlight on the water, the Suez Canal, the incredible blue of the Mediterranean. But I am at my best when I am driving my own car because I am in control. Which, mercifully, I still am, at 80 plus. But that is because I can still manage in spite of arthritis in both knees—I fit perfectly in my Zen.

Car travel is usually the most comfortable for silvers. They sit at the back while younger people drive and sit in front. If silvers sit beside the driver in front, they cannot avoid fastening their seatbelts. I am sorry to say that quite a few silvers, who refer to the seatbelt as a ‘dog collar’, cheat shamelessly and only wind it round their necks loosely. A dangerous practice, as it can become a noose. Please don’t cheat, fellow silvers. Seatbelts save lives.

On to train travel. We have all seen on TV the refreshing sight of an elderly couple refusing to be helped off a train by welcoming young relatives. But it is a different matter going to the washroom on most trains, including the Rajdhans.

There is a gap between two compartments with a dangerous opening on either side. It’s easy for one to slip and lose one’s balance. It is the same problem inside the washroom. If the train gives a sudden jerk, one’s foot can easily slip inside an Indian toilet. So one usually travels with a relative or friend who can help out by standing by in such a situation.

A sudden jerk is enough to lose one’s balance while using a train’s washroom

Also, some platforms are inordinately long. For example, the one at Kalka on the way to Shimla is so long that physically challenged people cannot walk so far. Such stations should provide wheelchairs, and ramps for them.

Talking of wheelchairs, I have found Indian Airlines, Sahara and Jet all helpful, although even if you ring them on arrival at the airport they take ages to pick you up from your car. There is one dismaying note: the concessional fare for is still steep—Rs 9,381 return Delhi-Kolkata-Delhi—which ought to cover the wheelchair service pleasantly.

But wheelchair attendants, especially at Kolkata, behave like beggars and openly extend their palms for tips without giving you a chance to offer one if they have done anything exceptional, not just their duty. This is very irritating and spoils an otherwise pleasant trip.

I am told that Sahara Airlines is very strict on this score and immediately sacks any wheel-

Amita Malik, often referred to as ‘the first lady of Indian media’, is a columnist and film critic
Vanity fair

Victor Banerjee examines the physical geography of an ageing face

FOR YEARS, I HAVE HAD TO deal with the recession of the cylindrical filamentous outgrowth on the epidermis of my scalp, fore and aft. It has been found in rodents that transplantation of only a few cells from the papillae underlying the matrix of active hair follicles leads to complete follicular regeneration. But the middle one-third of the human hair follicle appears to be necessary for successful hair transplantation. I’ve lost it.

When asked to write for *Harmony*, is it time to visit a cosmetic surgeon who can lift your face to the level of the spirits of adventure and fun that still rule your heart? We live in a country of a billion where just 2 per cent of the people pay income tax and then go on to worry about life passing them by and not being looked after in their old age. In villages they die of viruses when young or live to a ripe old age without ever visiting a dentist, while we in the big cities die of seizures and cerebral attacks at 40. And if we live on, we tremble with Parkinson’s disease or wander around aimless with ice-cream cones of hope with not a licker in sight, like Amitabh in Black.

Then take a walk through Joggers Park—like I had to in my film by the same name—or the boulevards in your neighbourhoods and you will see retired folks sitting on a bench staring at nothing, or waddling in sneakers while discussing the vagaries of the stock market and justifying their hanging on to the family purse strings.

Then there is that bunch of pensioners who snigger at everything that passes by in jeans or tank tops and, that amazing group that belongs to one of those laughing clubs that cheer you up, for sure, until you get back to a lift that is not working, or an irate husband or nagging wife or a miserly landlord.

Well, life leaves an impression on your corrugator muscles; which is a biologically humorous way of describing the delicate corrugated effect that begins to appear around your eyes and mouth, flippanly referred to as ‘laughter lines’, instead of calling them wrinkles. In fact as babies, our fat cheeks and shining faces are a result of an abundance of hyaluronic acid which, with age, recedes through the skull and leaves behind the furrows. That may be an adequate description of the physical geography of an ageing face but it leaves me with no choice but to start injecting toxins with side-effects like drooping eyelids.

But darn it, if Sanjay Dutt can get away with droops, why can’t I? And everyone from Sylvester Stallone down to the noble Liz Hurley has smoothed the care off their faces with Botulinum Toxin ‘A’, why not I? If I end up with two glistening bedroom eyes, hey, at my age that would justify the brand equity of Pfizer’s R&D laboratories, whose cure for erectile dysfunctions has lit up and lifted many a droopy eye.

‘Botox’ may rid me of my glabellar lines and a cosmetic surgeon may lift my sagging jowls up to my ears and stretch me to the point of an eternal and vacuum Cheshire smile. But it took years of effort to get the lines to appear on my face. They testify that my labours of love have not been in vain and should be left for my children to learn a lesson from their father’s ups and downs, successes and failures, that all gave them an upbringing that respects souls and not appearances. Should vanity not be redefined as being able to proudly look back on one’s own youth and now take joy in the emergence of a effervescent generation of hope? I am left thinking.

Victor Banerjee, 57, is an actor, writer, documentary maker and passionate trekker

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WORLD MUSIC

Music has no boundaries. Ask Vanraj Bhatia. Last month, India’s most versatile music composer was

in Seattle, Washington, to premiere his 2003 composition Six Hymns as part of a concert named Sanatan, which means ‘eternal’ in Sanskrit. Using hymns from the sacred text of Rig Veda including a Hymn to Agni, Hymn to Veda, Hymn to Ratri, Hymn to Marutas, Hymn to Usha, and a Hymn to Creation, the ensemble was presented to a foreign audience for the first time—he calls these “the earth and soul of this country”. The winner of several awards including the Gold Medal of the Royal Academy of Music, London, in 1954, the Bengal Film Journalist’s Award for the music score of films Bhoomika in 1976 and Manthan in 1977, the President’s Gold Medal for the music score of Tamas in 1988, and the Sangeet Natak Academy in 1989, the 78-year-old uses Sanskrit, Hindi and Gujarati in his choral arrangements, and is the only western music composer from India to do so.

AWARDED

The Jnanpith Award for 2002 to Tamil writer D Jayakanthan, 71. The author of 40 novels, 200 short stories—many of which have been made into films—and 15 collections of essays became the second Tamil writer after P V Akhilondam to receive the award. Many of his works, which deal with women’s issues, have been translated into other Indian languages as well as English, Russian, German and Japanese. The award carries a cash prize of Rs 5 lakh.

The 4th Paulos Mar Gregorious Award for 2005 for creative compassion to social activist Baba Amte, 90. His son Dr Vikas Amte received the award instituted by the Sophia Society of the Indian Orthodox Church in Delhi from Vice President Bhairon Singh Shekhawat on his behalf.

MUSICAL MEMORIES

As a child, her earliest memories were of running to the nearest gramophone shop to listen to the music they played and trying to sing the same way. Now, Hindustani classical singer Padminivishvan Gangubai Hangal has a museum dedicated to her. The Hangal Music Foundation has converted her house in Hubli, Karnataka, into a museum. Inaugurated by the singer, who turned 93 on March 5, it houses awards and honours received by her over the years. Rare visuals of noted musicians and vintage gramophone records adorn the walls. “Museums are necessary to preserve the tradition of music for future generations,” she says. Born in 1913 to a family of hereditary courtesan musicians from Hangal, a small village near Dharvar in north Karnataka, Gangubai learnt music from Sawai Gandharva of the Kirana gharana.
VISITORS

MAR 31-APR 4
Who: Sir Richard Branson, 55, chairman of Virgin Atlantic airways
Agenda: Exploring India’s telecommunications sector with a view to bringing his Virgin Mobile company to the country. Also announced Virgin Atlantic’s thrice-a-week flights to London from Mumbai
Extracurricular activities: Travelled in Mumbai’s local trains, interacted with the city’s dabbawallas, played cricket at El-Fengsarkar Academy, and partied hard at nightspots

APR 1-11
Who: Sir Cliff Richard, 65, British pop singer
Agenda: Holidaying with friends in Delhi, Jaipur and Agra
Extracurricular activities: Inaugurated a spiritual resort and old-age home called Punyadham Ashram on the outskirts of Pune

APR 1-4
Who: Farida Khanum, 70, Pakistan’s ghazal queen
Agenda: Performed at an event organised by SPIC-MACAY at Delhi’s Siri Fort auditorium
Extracurricular activities: Met friends, invited Lata Mangeshkar to sing in Pakistan at a press event

APR 8-11
Who: Zubin Mehta, 60, music conductor
Agenda: To conduct three concerts in Mumbai, organised by the Mehti Mehta Music Foundation, dedicated to the memory of his late father, who was also a conductor. The proceeds of one of the concerts went towards tsunami relief
Extracurricular activities: Hosted a dinner of traditional Parsi fare for his friends and troupe before the concerts. Mehta was dressed in Parsi attire for the dinner at Jeejeebboy Agiary in Mumbai.

GOLDEN JUBILEE

It has been 50 years of role playing. And 75-year-old Prabhakar V Panshikar is loving it. He first donned the greasepaint as a 15-year-old for the Marathi play Me Ubla Aahey, based on the municipal elections. “I acted in it without my parents’ knowledge,” he confesses. “After I failed to matriculate, I decided not to continue with my education.” His career began on March 13, 1955, and by the same date this year, he had acted in over 7,000 shows in Marathi, Hindi, English, Kannada and Gujarati plays. His family fears that the bypass surgery he underwent recently will force him to call it a day, but Panshikar refuses to hear any of it.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY

Ghazal singer Hariraran turned 50 on April 3. The occasion was celebrated in grand style at ITC Grand Maratha Hotel in Mumbai on April 6, with Amitabh Bachchan, Mehti Hassan and others joining in the celebrations. Two days earlier, Vijay TV organised a concert in Chennai where Hariraran sung hits from Tamil films. On hand to wish him were singer S P Balasubramaniam, actor Khushboo and composer Ilayaraaja.
H PEOPLE

IN PASSING

Pope John Paul II, 84, was laid to rest at Vatican City one week after he died fighting Parkinson’s disease, on April 2. The 264th pope held strong views against communism, imperialism and unrestrained capitalism, and rejected abortion, capital punishment, homosexuality and contraception. His trips around the world were viewed as significant efforts to broker peace between nations and religions.

Fans called him kadhal mannor king of romance. Tamil actor and Padmashri Gemini Ganesan, 84, died on March 22. A former chemistry professor, Ramaswami Ganesan joined Gemini Studios as a production executive in 1947. He left the studio soon after in 1952 to act in films—over 200 of them—but the name ‘Gemini’ stayed.

Scientist Dr R R Daniel, 81, died in Nagercoil near Chennai on March 27. A colleague of renowned scientist Homi Jehangir Bhabha and a founder member of the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research in Mumbai, Daniel studied cosmic rays and high-energy astronomy. He was awarded the Padma Bhushan in 1992.

His name is synonymous with modern Malayalam fiction. After spending a few years as professor of English literature in Calicut, Ootupulackal Vekukutty Vijayan, popularly known as O V Vijayan, joined Shankar’s Weekly in Delhi as cartoonist and political satirist in 1958. He went on to work with Patriot, The Hindu and The Statesman. On March 30, Vijayan, who was suffering from Parkinson’s disease, died of cardiac-respiratory failure. He was 75.

A month after the Congress returned to power in Haryana, it lost two of its most dynamic ministers. State agriculture minister Surinder Singh (top), 59, and power minister O P Jindal, 75, were both killed in a helicopter crash near Saharanpur in Uttar Pradesh on April 1. They were on their way from Delhi to Chandigarh. Jindal, chairman of the Jindal Group, a $2 billion conglomerate, had been named in Forbes magazine’s World Billionaire list in March. Singh, the youngest son of former Haryana chief minister Bansi Lal, was the face of the Haryana Vikas Party, and had been a Member of Parliament in both houses.

MEN OF HONOUR

In the past 50 years, their works have occupied a distinct place in contemporary Indian art. Padmashri Krishen Khanna, 79 (top), and Padmashri Ram Kumar, 81, are known for their defining styles. Taking note of their lifetime dedication to artistic expression, the awards committee at the 10th Harmony Art Show conferred the Harmony Heritage Award for Lifetime Contribution in Art, Literature and Culture on the two artists on April 1. “They are quiet people who have been working their whole life, giving shape to contemporary Indian art in the post-Independence era,” says Vickram Sethi, curator. “It feels wonderful to be chosen,” says Gurgaon-based Khanna, who was a member of the Progressive Artists Group in Mumbai—an art movement in the 1950s that fought against British influence in art. “I felt very happy when I was told about the award,” says Delhi-based Kumar, who prefers solo shows to group exhibitions. “Group shows often have no sense of direction. But they prove to be a good platform for young artists to showcase their talent.”
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BRAIN GYM

MAD ABOUT BUTTERFLIES
Professor Melvin Murdoch has recently returned from South America with many butterfly specimens. The nine butterflies pictured are The Double-Spotted (1, 4 and 9), the Greater-Striped (2, 6 and 7) and the Many-Speckled (3, 5 and 8). Match each butterfly with its country of origin and the name of the enthusiast it was purchased from.

1. Professor Murdoch acquired two specimens of the same variety of butterfly from fellow enthusiasts in Bolivia and Brazil.

2. The butterfly from Peru is pictured either immediately above or below the one from Mr Peiro.

3. One of the Greater-Striped butterflies is from Chile and is pictured to the right of, and immediately next to, the butterfly from Mrs Fernandez.

4. The Double-Spotted butterfly bought from Mr De Falla is pictured immediately next to a Many-Speckled butterfly, acquired in Ecuador.

5. The Many-Speckled butterfly from Paraguay is pictured right next to the butterfly from Bolivia. The specimen from Mrs Gilberto is at No. 6.

6. The butterfly from Argentina is pictured above the one from Mr Bonares, which is immediately to the left of the one bought from Mr Gomez, and all three butterflies are of different varieties.

7. The butterfly from Mr Valdiz and the butterfly from Venezuela are of different varieties and one is pictured immediately below the other.

8. The butterfly from Uruguay is on the same vertical line but not above or below the one from Mr Mendez, which is on the same horizontal line but not next to the butterfly from Mr Garcia, which isn’t one of the Many-Speckled variety.

For solution, see page 79

SAY IT OUT LOUD

True friendship is like sound health; the value of it is seldom known until it is lost.

— Charles Caleb Colton, humour writer

Friendship is unnecessary, like philosophy, like art. It has no survival value; rather it is one of those things that give value to survival.

— C S Lewis, writer

My best friend is the one who brings out the best in me.

— Mother Teresa

A friend walks in when the rest of the world walks out.

— Abraham Lincoln
NEW TIPS FOR BEGINNERS: A whole variety of clues goes into framing a cryptic puzzle. For instance, the anagram. The clue here could be: Unresting opponent of authority (Unresting being the 9 letters of insurgent rearranged). Another variety of clue is the palindrome—DEIFIED, when viewed backward or when viewed up in a Down clue, reads DEIFIED all the way. Next, there could be the clue (8-letter answer) reading: Complete view of daughter sandwiched between parents—PANORAMA (PANORAMA). The 8-letter solution to the clue, The framework of our constitution, is SKELETON. At times, what looks straight could prove tricky. For example, the clue, How we stand—has UNITED for its 6-letter answer. The clue, How we fall, has DIVIDED for its 7-letter answer. The clue, Walls have them yet they hear not, has EARS for its answer. Next, pertinacity could split into Pert in a city, face to face into fact of ace. For ANISEED, the clue could be: Carminative I see inside and outside—AN(SEE)ID. The possibilities are endless.
LAUGH LINES

Three elderly gentlemen were talking about what their grandchildren would be saying about them 50 years from now. "I would like my grandchildren to say, 'He was successful in business'," declared the first man. "Fifty years from now," said the second, "I want them to say, 'He was a loyal family man'." Turning to the third man, the first one asked, "So, what do you want them to say about you in 50 years?" "Me?" the third man replied. "I want them all to say, 'He certainly looks good for his age'!"

One day, a man walked into a dentist’s office and asked how much it would cost to extract a wisdom tooth. "Two thousand rupees," said the dentist. "That’s a ridiculous amount," the man said. "Isn’t there a cheaper way?" "Well," the dentist said, "if you don’t use an anaesthetic, I can knock it down to Rs 1,500." "That’s still too expensive," the man said. "Okay," said the dentist. "If I save on anaesthesia and simply rip the teeth out with a pair of pliers, I could get away with charging Rs 300." "No," moaned the man, "it’s still too much." "Hmm," said the dentist, scratching his head. "If I let one of my students do it for the experience, I suppose I could charge you just Rs 100."
"Marvelous," said the man, "book my wife for next Tuesday!"

One evening, two elderly men were sitting together on a porch. One said to the other, "You know Manohar, if you think about it, we are not that old. My memory is still very good." As the man said this, he knocked on the wooden chair beside him. "Actually, as sharp as ever." After a couple of minutes of silence, the first man started to talk again, saying: "So, is anyone going to get the door, or do I have to do it?"

BACK TO SCHOOL

FOCUS ON THE CAMERA
Imagine not having a camera to capture those special family moments. The name is derived from camera obscura, Latin for ‘dark chamber’. Every camera consists of an enclosed chamber, with an opening at one end for light to enter, and a recording or viewing surface for capturing the light at the other. A still film camera comprises an optical element (the lens), a chemical element (the film) and a mechanical element (the camera body itself). These combine to record a crisp, recognisable image.

Let’s look at a manual single-lens-reflex (SLR) camera. Here, the photographer sees exactly the same image that is exposed to the film and can adjust everything by turning dials and clicking buttons. The optical component is the lens. At its simplest, a lens is just a curved piece of glass or plastic. It takes the beams of light bouncing off of an object and redirects them to form a real image, one that looks like the scene in front of the lens.

The nature of this image varies depending on how the light travels through the lens. This light path depends on the angle of the light beam’s entry into the lens and the structure of the lens. Professional cameras let you attach different lenses to see the scene at various magnifications. The magnification power of a lens is described by its focal length. In cameras, the focal length is defined as the distance between the lens and the real image of an object in the far distance. A higher focal length number indicates a greater image magnification.

Now, on to developing your photographs. Colour film has three different layers of light-sensitive materials, which respond, in turn, to red, green and blue. When developed, these are exposed to chemicals that dye the layers of film. When you overlay the colour information from all three, you get a full-colour negative. When the film is developed, it is exposed to other chemicals that react with the light-sensitive grains. In black-and-white film, the developer chemicals darken the grains that were exposed to light. This produces a negative where lighter areas appear darker and darker areas appear lighter, which is then converted into a positive image in printing.
HAMMING IT UP  PAGE 57
• Amateur Radio Society of India, 4, Kurla Industrial Estate, Ghatkopar, Mumbai-400086
• Ministry of Communications;
  Website: www.vigyanprasar.ham/hamradio.htm
• National Institute of Amateur Radio,
  Box 1555, Somajiguda, Hyderabad-500082;
  Tel: 040-3310287; Fax: 040-3311073;
  Email: niarindia@hotmail.com; Website: www.niar.org

JOURNEY INTO YOUR HEART  PAGE 60
Madhya Pradesh Tourism Corporation:
• Room No 12, Hotel Janpath, Janpath, New Delhi-110001; Tel: 011-23341187;
  Email: mpstdc@vsnl.com
• 45, World Trade Centre, Cuffe Parade, Mumbai-400005; Tel: 022-22187603;
  Email: tourmp_mumbai@hathway.com

HEADSTART SOLUTIONS  PAGE 76
EXCLUSIVE HARMONY CROSSWORD 8

ACROSS: 1 (Brian) Taber; 8 Dinesh (Khanna, the badminton ace, the 6 letters of Dinesh rearrange as Shinde); 9 ANUPAM (Kher) — An(UPA)m; 10 inset (in/set); 11 leaner (not as round as before, one who leans, is not straight); 12 long-on; 13 Monroe; 15 RAMALLAH (RAM/ALLAH); 18 Stephen (Step-hen — the old rooster’s second wife’); 19 skipper; 22 Srinagar — its 8 letters rearrange as arraigns; 26 No Azam; 29 Nusrat (her 6 letters rearrange as Saturn); 30 Esther (Williams); 31 (Hare Krushna) Konar — K(O)NAR is RANK withdrawn (read back) about O (circle); 32 Wealth (its 6 letters rearrange as the law); 33 air-bed; 34 A BOON (a Bo on)

DOWN: 1 Cicero; 2 Meenar; 3 Third-Eye (candy); 4 Bisleri (Risible, its 7 letters rearranged); 5 Ratlam - Ra(tl a)m (elevating a lt in Ram); 6 tunnel; 7 Baroda (the Maharaja abroad --- the 6 letters of Baroda rearrange as abroad); 13 masks; 14 Neeti (nee/ti, it upset); 16 Lopez (Jennifer); 17 harem; 20 Kunderan — Unranked, the 8 letters of his name rearranged); 21 Orlando; 23 Roused --- Ro(use)d: use going into Rod; 24 Nirala; 25 Gutkha; 27 Actors (its 6 letters rearrange as Castro); 28 A Lever (product)

MAD ABOUT BUTTERFLIES

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<td>1</td>
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I am 58 years old and offer free advice on property matters and sale or purchase of homes near Mumbai.
Contact Vinesh Chandra at 022-55766340

I am a 67-year-old retired principal of a management staff college and conduct programmes on retirement planning (psychological, financial, residential, drafting wills, time management, etc). I am willing to conduct such workshops in other cities.
Contact: Rajendra Prasad in Lucknow at (0522) 2308557; Mobile: 9335266269;
Email: prasadhr@sify.com, prasadrrk@hotmail.com

I am 50 years old and want to sell office furniture, Pentium I computer, telephones, fax, etc.
Contact: Alok Tholiya in Mumbai at 022-26164506,
26173203; Email: tholiya@hotmail.com

Senior person, experienced in stores and warehousing operations, seeks assignment in Navi Mumbai.
Contact: Vidyanand M Joshi at 09323586348;
Email: vidyanand.joshi@rediffmail.com
“When I first came to Raphael Home, I was horrified to see children affected with leprosy. I kept coming back, working on my fear factor. When I joined the home, I went straight to the ‘leper colony’, and had tea with the people there. Later, many of our guests like Mother Teresa and the Dalai Lama also did the same. In fact, when the Dalai Lama came to visit in 1995, he was so taken aback to find an 84-year-old man sitting in the director’s chair that he sent for a bigger shawl to gift to me. Perhaps, for Tibetans it means more respect!”

—Ranbir Bakhshi

For over three decades, Major General (retd) Ranbir Bakhshi, 94, has been working for those afflicted with leprosy. In 1974, he joined the Raphael Home as director. The 36-year-old home, located in the quiet Dalanwala suburb of Dehradun, cares for people with chronic disease and disability—including leprosy, tuberculosis, and intellectual disability—and their children. Bakhshi helps them earn a living by teaching them weaving, spinning, tailoring, painting and making candles. A few years after he joined the home, he heard that children of leprosy patients were being thrown out of schools because of the stigma attached to their parents. So Bakhshi got them readmitted, filling in his own name in the admission form under ‘guardian’. He is now the proud ‘father’ of nearly 100 such children studying in schools and colleges across the country.
Exclusive column by
Victor Banerjee
Real life in an
old-age home

Surrender to the wilds of
Madhya Pradesh

Kasha National Park (160 km from Jabalpur): Kasha’s salad ingredients, groves and streams stretch over 945 sq km in undulating sal forest. This Project Tiger Reserve is home to a variety of wildlife. It also has little population of Sarus Crane. Besides, there are over 200 species of birds, creating a biodiversity hot spot.

Bandhavgarh National Park (164 km from Jabalpur; 27 km from Khajuraho): Bandhavgarh National Park is one place where you can see the maximum number of tigers in their natural habitat. Stretching over 448 sq km, Bandhavgarh National Park is also rich in other forms of wildlife. The dense forests,最合适 and small

Pench National Park (114 km from Nagpur; 195 km from Jabalpur): The Pench Tiger Reserve forms the core of the Tiger’s habitat. The National Parks are a hub for bird watching, and the diverse flora and fauna attract more than 2,000 species of birds. The park is part of the Bandhavgarh Fort and numerous prehistoric caves, with prehistoric paintings and drawings.

Jungle Plan for Tiger Country

Welcome to Khajuraho, Madhya Pradesh’s famous National Parks! Visiting these wildlife reserves is now made easy for your clients, both at or outside of Jabalpur, and leave the rest to us. As soon as they arrive, your clients will be thrilled. We will take care of all the entry formalities, accommodation and meals. Tiger shows, guided park walks and the services of a forest guide are all part of our Jungle Plan. So are elephant rides, using tans and saws. In short, we’ll do your thing and you’ll know what to come back!
The golden years are ahead...

The golden years of life begin after the golden jubilee.
Celebrate the richer phase of life.

Action Man
Julio Ribeiro

Exclusive column by Victor Banerjee
Real life in an old-age home